The Book Acts

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The Very Early History of the Book Acts

1. The situation (Acts 1:15)
   - About 120 disciples are gathered after the Lord's ascension.
   - Peter stands up among them to address a serious issue: the place that Judas has left empty.

2. Peter's main points about Judas (vv. 16–17)
   1. Scripture had to be fulfilled
      - Peter says that what happened with Judas was foretold by the Holy Spirit through David in the Psalms.
      - Judas did not just "happen" – his betrayal and fall were known in advance by God and written in Scripture.
   2. Judas' role and fall
      - Judas:
        - "Was numbered with us" – he was counted as one of the Twelve.
        - "Had obtained part of this ministry" – he had a real share in the apostolic service.
        - Guided those who arrested Jesus – he led the enemies of the Lord to Him.
      - His end is described in stark terms:
        - He took his own life.
        - He fell headlong, his body burst open, and his insides poured out.
        - That place came to be known as "Aceldama" – the Field of Blood.
   3. Old Testament prophecies applied to Judas
      Peter links Judas to two Psalms (especially Psalm 69 and 109):
      - "Let their habitation be desolate" – applied to Judas as: "Let his habitation be desolate."
      - "Let another take his office (bishoprick)" – his official position must be given to someone else.

In the Psalms these words concern the unbelieving people who reject the Lord; Peter now applies them to Judas as an individual picture of that people.

3. Judas as a picture of unbelieving Israel
The symbolic meaning:
- "Judas" = "Judah" (the Jews)
  Judas is not only a man; he is a sign of the Jewish people, especially those in Jerusalem who rejected their Messiah.
- They stumbled over "the Stone"
  Just as Judas fell and was shattered, so Israel stumbled over Christ, the "stone of stumbling and rock of offence" (Isaiah 8; quoted by Peter in 1 Peter 2 and alluded to by Christ in Matthew 21:44).

- The Psalms and Isaiah 28 describe:
    - Israel clinging to the Law as a table which becomes a snare rather than a blessing.
    - Their eyes darkened, their backs bowed down under a burden they cannot carry.
- So Judas' end pictures the spiritual state and judgment of unbelieving Israel, who betray and reject their own Messiah.

4. Why Judas must be replaced (transition to Matthias)

- Judas had held an official, God-given office:
  to be an apostolic witness of Christ's resurrection.
- That office cannot simply vanish; Scripture itself says:

"His bishoprick let another take."

- So Peter leads the disciples to choose another (Matthias) to:
    - Restore the number back to twelve,
    - Maintain the symbolic completeness of Israel in its ideal form,
    - And ensure there are twelve official witnesses to the resurrection.

This replacement also hints at a shift:

- Judas (Judah / the two tribes) is set aside;
- Another takes his place – seen as a picture of the ten tribes / wider Israel and, ultimately, of the Church called from among the nations.

5. The wider lesson (Law vs faith)

Judas/Israel as a warning about religion and the Law:

- Living under the Law closes the heart and leads to bondage, guilt, and ultimately opposition to Christ.
- Faith means the heart is filled with the Word of God, and life flows from within rather than being driven by external rules.
- Judas and Israel show what happens when people cling to religion instead of receiving Christ.
- The call of God, from Abraham to Hebrews 13, is:

"Go out" – leave the old system, go "outside the camp" to Christ,
and live by grace under the New Covenant, not under the yoke of the Law

After Christ resurrection, the Apostle Peter, had the 'key' to freely speak about the Gospel of God and he has a personal invite for each of us to be part of the New Covenant and a New Creation. Other apostles in the Book Acts were personal witnesses of this most important event of all mankind, intended for both Gentiles and Jews alike. There were special emphasis the two tribes, under the name "Judah", who were bound to make a decision concerning Jesus, and what had been written in "the Law and the Prophets". Up to chapter 21 the Jews are continually asked to come to faith. As a people, at the governmental level, and they refused, but afterwards the preaching went mainly to the "Gentiles" - the ten tribes, who respond favourably. The hardened Jewish people did not want to hear, despite all the signs (miracles) and fulfilment of Old Testament

prophecies. They stubbornly refuse to listen to Peter or to Stephen, who summarises the history of Israel and, like the Lord Jesus, died.
And then Paul, the Benjamite, appears on the scene. Everywhere he goes, he first approaches the Jews in the dispersion to tell them that salvation, the Kingdom of Christ, had already found a dwelling among the Gentiles, especially among the ten tribes of Israel. What this “Gentile apostle” experiences is simply very thrilling. That Paul survives all this can be nothing other than by the protection of the Lord Himself. With, as a beautiful and for us encouraging conclusion, chapter 27, which has great typological hint. Acts is a fascinating history concerning the Gospel, which is first preached in Jerusalem, but ultimately arrives in Rome, at the official representative of the ten tribes. The diligent Bible student, seeking the Truth and the Plan of God, will find in Acts the pearls which the Lord has placed in His Word. A great deal is contained in the often very detailed accounts. The central theme which Peter, Stephen, Philip, and above all Paul show again and again, is that the salvation of the two tribes has passed to the ten tribes. Not only at the end of Acts, in chapter 28, but already before.

Acts 1:1–3
1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,
2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:
3 To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.
Acts 28:23 says that Paul explained the Kingdom of God. And afterwards verse 31:
“…preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.”
Which is simply to say that the entire book deals with the Kingdom of God. At the end of the book, Paul looks back and informs the Jewish leaders in Rome of the fact that the Kingdom of God, and thus salvation, has been sent to the Gentiles. Gentiles are “non-Jews”. They are those who do not have the Law and have withdrawn themselves from society.
The title “Acts of the Apostles” is misleading. It actually concerns only two apostles: Peter and Paul. John is also mentioned twice. As far as “the twelve” are concerned, it thus concerns only one. James is mentioned when he is beheaded. From about chapter 12 onwards it concerns Paul among the Gentiles and his ministry as “apostle to the Gentiles”. One could therefore just as well call the book: “The Acts of Peter and Paul”. Rather well-known is: “The Acts of the Holy Spirit”. Or: “The Acts of Jesus Christ”. For ultimately it concerns what He does.
It follows directly upon the four Gospels—four descriptions of the life of the Lord Jesus in this old creation, and even as the old man: in the flesh. Four accounts of the life of the Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh, but as soon as He has risen from the dead, the four end and it continues with the fifth that follows. With the five, in which all four converge. Behind that

outward history stands the five: the One Who hides Himself, the letter “H”, the five.
Although Acts is not a doctrinal book, everything that is written in the Bible has doctrinal value. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine.” (2 Timothy 3:16, KJV) Thus this also applies to the historical books. Acts is regarded as history, but that history is the outworking of doctrine—the outworking of what lives in man, in what he has been taught, with which his heart is filled. Acts is the expression of doctrine as it is taught in the epistles. The practice is Acts. There one encounters how it works. It is the expression of the instruction of the doctrine that the believers received, and the expression of the work of God as such.
The Lord Jesus appeared publicly. Everyone knew Him. He had manifested Himself, as Peter clearly cites in Acts 2. But since He has died and risen, He does not appear. He has only proven—demonstrated—that He has conquered death.
That the Church at that moment takes the place of the Jewish people is illustrated in Acts 1. The doctrine concerning this is found in Romans, the first New Testament epistle—particularly chapters 8 to 11. Romans is the doctrinal book. In Acts it is portrayed and practised. Who is the great figure in Acts? Paul, the Roman—at any rate it concludes with him. The story begins in Jerusalem and ends in Rome. We find doctrine portrayed and expressed in practice, and how that works out in believers.
Verse 1: “The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus.”
Theos means God, and philus means a “friend”. Thus Theophilus is a “friend of God”: someone who loves God. This is written for all who love God. This means, therefore, that there was not necessarily a man of that name. “The former treatise” refers to the Gospel of Luke. In the introduction of that Gospel something similar is stated, and Theophilus is mentioned there for the first time. In this way the two books are linked together. The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts are by the same author —Luke. The Gospel of Luke ends with the ascension of the Lord Jesus. Acts continues from there and recounts it somewhat more extensively. It begins with the instructions concerning the nature of the Kingdom of God and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Verse 3 says: “To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion.” This is also found in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, where among other things it states that the Risen One appeared to various persons, later to 500 at once, and last of all also to Paul. His disciples would not see Him after that. This had been foretold. But also: “Ye shall be witnesses unto me.” So they were to speak about the fact that He lives. That is also what this book is about: the living Christ, Who is active in, and therefore through, the believer—particularly through this apostle.
Verse 3: “…to whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs.” The word for “proofs” is the same as for “marks” or “scars”. When He rose from the dead in a glorified body, He had those scars. When He appears in the future to the Jewish people, indeed to all Israel, they will even ask Him: what are these scars? For they will not yet recognise that it is Jesus. They will think: it is Jehovah. In that they will be

correct, but it will prove to be Jesus—recognisable by His scars. Not only the Lord will be recognisable in the future, but so will we. The Lord Jesus makes Himself known and thereby reveals His Truth: the Word of God—and with it the praise and glory of God—in the midst of His brethren and in a great Congregation. This was already illustrated here when the Lord had risen. He appeared to His disciples for forty days. He was seen by them. They learned to see Him, I always think. He spoke with them of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God—of the New Covenant. Of that Kingdom which has been established through the resurrection of Christ. For the Truth remains that the Kingdom of God came into being when the King was crowned. The revelation of the Kingdom, however, waits for the future. In anticipation of that revelation, the Lord performs a work upon the Church, which is His Body. Whether the Lord also discussed all such things in detail, I do not know; nor whether the disciples were fully instructed after those forty days. They were in any case instructed before they began their task on the day of Pentecost.

On the other hand, it is illustrative of the present work of Christ. What He does from His resurrection until the end of the seventieth week of Daniel is this: He makes Himself known; He appears to us. Not literally, but He still appears. For “shining” is letting light shine. He shines His Light into our hearts. This is explained extensively in the epistles. He speaks with us, to us, of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God, so that we may be prepared for our future ministry. There is little to explain about the Kingdom of God, except concerning the new aspect of it: the position of the Church. Everything else is already in the Old Testament. The new must be explained. That is what the apostle does. The Lord Jesus also, as do all New Testament books.

Acts 1:4–8

4 And being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

The Lord does not answer the question directly: “Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” He had already spoken about the Holy Spirit and His working, and even after the disciples’ question He continues on the subject of the Holy Spirit. If the Kingdom were to be restored to Israel, what then should the disciples do? Based on Old Testament statements: they should remain in Jerusalem waiting for the Messiah to appear, set His throne there, and then be sent forth by the Messiah to bring the Gospel to the whole earth and to all nations. If He

were to reveal His Kingdom, they would be “witnesses unto me… in Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria—that stands for the ten tribes of Israel; “the uttermost parts of the earth”.

Verse 7: “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.” This verse is often torn completely out of context and quoted. It is applied to what we call “the Second Coming of Christ”, or more specifically to “the rapture of the Church”. But that is not at all what it is about. This is often the case with such expressions. When people say, “We cannot know,” they always have a Bible text at hand. Yet the verses which say “we cannot know” usually concern something entirely different. Fundamentally, the issue here is: “Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” That question is therefore not answered directly—indeed, not answered at all. The simple question—can it be in this time?—cannot be answered with a yes or no. The Lord does not answer it. Moreover He says: that does not concern you. For the time being it did not concern them. There is a good reason for that.

The establishment or re-establishment of the Kingdom for Israel is not merely a matter of time, but depends greatly upon whether Israel will repent—whether it will call upon the Name of the Lord and come to faith. When will it do so? The question at that time might be: will Israel in this period call upon the Name of the Lord? We might ask: when will Israel call upon the Name of the Lord? After the Great Tribulation—or better still, in the Great Tribulation. So one might also ask: has the seventieth week already begun? It is not so much about a date as about the repentance of, officially, the Jewish people. That will be after three and a half years of Great Tribulation—the second half of the seventieth week of Daniel. At its end they will call upon the Name of the Lord—in Jerusalem. Then the seventy weeks will be fulfilled. Then the Lord will answer the prayer of those who call upon the Name of the Lord. But whether this would happen in the days of the disciples? Well, the Lord said to the disciples: “It is not for you to know …” Why not for them? Or why not for believers in general yet? Because this depended on whether in those days the Jewish people would officially call upon the Name of the Lord. That is one of the central themes in Acts. Repeatedly the Sanhedrin appears in Acts. Up to this point the Lord continues with that theme. The disciples were going too quickly. They had a burning question, and the Lord says: be patient. It will all come. But it begins with this: “He commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father.” They must wait for what the Holy Spirit would do. They were to undertake nothing. The Spirit—the Holy Spirit, indeed Christ Himself—would do His work in them. The expression “the promise of the Father” refers to the Holy Spirit, Who was already promised in the Old Testament. What was promised in the Old Testament? Among other things, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The expression comes from there: “I will pour out my spirit”—that is Zechariah 12. And Joel 2: “I will pour out my spirit upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem,” or upon “all flesh”. That which was promised was this: the Messiah, Who would come—and all else that was promised would come with the Messiah. The Seed of the woman (Genesis 3) was promised; and

also the Seed of Abraham, the Seed of David, and a Prophet like Moses. In general a New Covenant was promised. That is why He is also called the "Holy Spirit of promise." (Ephesians 1:13). What is the Holy Spirit? The Life—and thus the Essence—of Christ the Messiah. In the Old Testament He is already called "Holy Spirit". In Isaiah 63:10–11 He is named in that way. The disciples were to wait for the working of that Spirit. To the Old Testament believers it had been promised that they would one day receive that Spirit—the Holy Spirit.

To be "baptized with the Holy Spirit" is a popular term in some circles. That is because the once-for-all event on the day of Pentecost is called "the outpouring of the Holy Spirit". And some consider once to be very little. They detach the expression and use phrases such as "baptism with, by, in, or because of the Holy Spirit"—or shorter still, to avoid the prepositions and the debate: "Spirit baptism". By this they understand that someone who has come to faith must afterwards still experience something—must feel and undergo something which the Holy Spirit is supposed to perform.

What does the Spirit do? He causes us to be born again, for where we receive the Spirit, we receive the life of Christ. We must be born of the Spirit in order to be members of the Body of Christ. Then we have the same Life in us, as believers, as people who are born again, as that which the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has received. And if it is the same Life in each one of us, then we are therefore members one of another.

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." 1 Corinthians 12:13

It is almost as though Acts 1:5 was written in order to explain that word baptism to us. It is not merely "immersion", but "saturation". The Spirit will completely fill us. The word baptism is generally used in a much broader sense: that of identification, of being joined to, of becoming one with, of fellowship. So what has the Spirit done? He has united us with Christ. The Spirit is the Life of Christ, and that Life has entered into us through the resurrection of Christ.

But what then happened on the day of Pentecost? On that day the power of the Holy Spirit came upon them, with the result that they would be His witnesses; that the Spirit would become active in them. That is something different from receiving the Holy Spirit.

Verse 6: "They therefore that were come together asked of him: Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" I am inclined to put verses 6 and 7 in brackets, because verse 8 fits seamlessly after verse 5. The Lord simply ignores the question. You can already regard verse 4 as the answer to the question in verses 6 and 7. There the Lord says: in any case, you must remain in Jerusalem and wait for the working of the Holy Spirit. That is also what verse 8 is about. Verse 5 is the explanation of it. John the Baptist had indeed said: hereafter, not many days hence, ye shall receive that Spirit. The result of this is verse 8.

The question is whether, in those days, they would call upon the Name of the Lord or not. No, they do not do so—not even some decades later in Acts 28. Undoubtedly the Lord knew what would happen, but the disciples apparently were not allowed to know. The more I read the beginning of Acts, the more I have the impression that the disciples knew very well that

it would not happen in their days. They asked anyway. They simply had to do what needed to be done: preach the Gospel, beginning at Jerusalem. Whether the people would come to faith or not, that they were not to know.
A few days before the Lord suffered and died, they had asked Him similar questions. Then the Lord announced the destruction of Jerusalem. According to Zechariah 14 and Daniel 9 and onwards, the destruction of Jerusalem immediately precedes the appearing of the Lord on the Mount of Olives. From the moment the Lord said this, there would be two such destructions: one in the year 70, and the other is yet to come. But when the Lord spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem, it seemed to conflict with the fact that the Lord was in the process of establishing His Kingdom in Jerusalem. Thus, when He said, “there shall not be left here one stone upon another”, the question was:
“Tell us, when shall these things be?” Matthew 24:3
Then there followed a lengthy explanation of all that would take place, but from it one cannot deduce how long it would still last, although a sequence of events is indeed given. At most, a general outline is provided. When similar questions were raised among the Thessalonians, Paul writes:
“But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.
For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.”
(1 Thessalonians 5:1–2)
They were allowed to know it all precisely. But that is some years later. Such things can be known, but here, at this point in time, they were not to know, were not yet to know; it was not yet intended. The official answer to the question, “Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” would have to be: I do not determine that; the people do. Whether they come to faith or not.
The question, “Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” can also be answered in this way: “I shall indeed establish a Kingdom, but not now for natural Israel, the Jewish people.” In any case, it remains that the question is not: “Wilt thou at this time make Thy Kingdom manifest to Israel?” Nothing was to be revealed. On the contrary, the very opposite happened. The Lord, the King Himself—and therefore His Kingdom as well—hid Himself. And He remains hidden until the Jewish people in Jerusalem shall call upon the Name of the Lord.
Our dispensation began with Jerusalem, then Samaria—literally and figuratively the ten tribes—and so on to “the ends of the earth”. In the future, when the Jewish people shall come to repentance, and thus the Kingdom of Christ will be established for Israel, that period will begin in exactly the same way. The preaching of the Gospel will begin in Jerusalem, all Judaea, that is, to the two tribes, and then to Samaria, the ten tribes. Afterwards, from the twelve tribes together, the Gospel will be preached to all nations by the 144,000 “witnesses of Jehovah” (Revelation 7). It is the normal order. It was so in the past, and it will be so in the future. Our dispensation began with a quotation from Joel, and the next one will begin in the same way:

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10:13 / Joel 2:32)

Acts 1:9–12
9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.
10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;
11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.
12 Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day’s journey.
Not only was something to happen from Jerusalem, but more precisely, we come to the Mount of Olives, near Jerusalem. Here we are at the last sign of the Lord during His walk on earth. He is taken away from their eyes, and after that they saw Him no more. In Luke 24 it says that this was at Bethany (“Beth-ani” = “the house am I”), which lies on the top of the Mount of Olives. There He disappeared, and there He will also appear again in the future (see, among others, Zechariah 12 and 14).
The Mount of Olives represents our present dispensation. The King, the glory of Christ, salvation, the Kingdom, is taken away from Jerusalem—and where does it then come? Where is the Lord? On the Mount of Olives, outside Jerusalem. Before Jerusalem, as it says several times in the Old Testament. That is a picture of the present Kingdom of Christ: not in Israel, but outside Israel and prior to its being in Jerusalem.
At the Mount of Olives—in Acts 1—the story breaks off, for here the Lord is seen for the last time, and there the story will be completed in the future. This is what is expressed in this sign: the ascension. The real ascension of the Lord Jesus took place forty days earlier. What happens here is a sign. In the first place, a sign that it had taken place, but more than that, a sign of how things would continue. It is stated literally: “this same Jesus… shall so come.” It is not so much His ascension as the portrayal of the opposite: His return—and that is explicitly stated.
A few weeks before this, the disciples were on their way to Jerusalem with the Lord Jesus. They came within sight of the city, and then it says:
“And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable,
because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought
that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.”
(Luke 19:11)
The disciples thought that the Kingdom of God would immediately appear. Do not misunderstand that expression. The issue is not whether the Kingdom would begin—that is another matter. The question is whether it would also be manifested in Jerusalem. But because it says, “they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear,” the Lord tells a parable.
Parables always speak of our present time, without exception. The Lord Jesus says in Matthew 13 that He does this:

“…because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.”
(Matthew 13:11)
Parables are meant to hide things—from the crowd—but to reveal them to the disciples.
They receive no direct answer, because in fact one cannot be given. But the answer is: the Kingdom will indeed be established, but not for Israel now, and besides, it will remain hidden from the world. Yet for you, disciples, it makes no difference, because whether it is manifested or not, in every case it means that you will be witnesses of the Lord Jesus. “Ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” That is also what they did, and that is what will happen again in the future, after the rapture of the Church.
Verse 9: “And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.” What I want to stress is that we should notice how often—in verses 9 to 12—it is said that it concerns something visible (six times). That would not have needed to be stated; we could have assumed they saw it. But why is it written? Quite simply: what they saw here, they were meant to take in. They saw the Lord visibly ascending into heaven.
The exaltation of the Lord Jesus is in the hierarchical sense of the word. It has nothing to do with metres upwards. Heaven begins where the earth ends, and that is, roughly speaking, a millimetre above the ground. The earth is the ground beneath our feet; above that is heaven. In this connection we must distinguish between the created heavens of Genesis 1:1 and the “heaven of heavens”—the heaven “which is of old”, which has always been. That is what we call the spiritual, the unseen world. That heaven is not far away. It is around us. It is even in us. In that sense, it is not difficult to understand that the Lord has a position in heaven and at the same time in your heart and mine. That is perfectly possible. It is not even a difference of place.
They could follow Him with their eyes and watch Him go; all of that is recorded. And “a cloud received him out of their sight.” What is the point of this? This is the last sign the Lord Jesus performed “in the days of his flesh” (Hebrews 5:7, KJV) on earth. It was a picture of the return of Christ. That is not a mere idea of ours; it is stated plainly. What they saw is, so to speak, the return of Christ—but in reverse. It was a sign, and also an answer to the question: “Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” The answer is: no. He now has a Kingdom hidden in heaven, but in the future there will come a day when the Lord will appear out of the cloud, as people look upward—out of the cloud. Then the cloud will not hide Him from sight. The cloud will have to give way to a glorified Christ, Who on that occasion will set His feet upon the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4). That is what they saw: a picture of His return, and thus a portrayal—a sign—of how He will in the future at last reveal His Kingdom to Israel. Just as literally as this same Jesus, in His resurrection body, went up, so shall He come again out of the clouds. What is the cloud a picture of? Of the Holy Spirit. Of Christ as the Invisible One—for the Holy Spirit is also

simply called Christ, “the Spirit of Christ”. He is Christ, but then as the Invisible, or at least the Intangible One: the One who has no official form in this world.
On the boundary between the visible and the invisible you find a cloud. Sometimes you can see through it, sometimes not. You try to seize it, but then it is not there; you have passed through it and you have not grasped it. It was there, nonetheless. So on the boundary between the visible and the invisible—and likewise on the boundary between the tangible and the intangible, on the boundary between those two worlds, heaven and earth—such a cloud appears. And from our side, from the earthly perspective, a cloud is a representation of spiritual, heavenly things. To us it is beyond our grasp, intangible, and yet it is there. If you could see invisible things, you could see God Himself—and in practice that would be the Lord Jesus. But in our days the Lord hides Himself; He does not reveal Himself openly. The best you still “see”, as it were, is a “cloud”, for this is all picture-language. When He returns, He will appear out of that invisible world and will appear visibly and tangibly upon the earth.
There are men who explain the words, “and a cloud received him out of their sight”, by saying: this is how it fits together. Those two men, even if they really were Moses and Elijah, are a picture of the Church. They express the Church. In Scripture the Church is presented in symbol as a “dual”, a twofold entity. This is because of the birthright of the Church. The Church is firstborn, and the firstborn counts as two, receives a double portion, a double inheritance. These are fixed principles, and therefore you find this “two” in many places. For example, in the parable of the two mites (Mark 12). Two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24). There were two disciples who followed the Lord, Andrew and another (John 1). The “male”, the Church, is pictured there. Or in the two little fishes with the five loaves (John 6). Everyone knows that the fish is a sign of the Church—though people usually say: of Christianity. You even have Paul’s ship in Acts 28, with which he is on his way (there it is Rome, not Jerusalem) and it is said of that ship that it had for its sign “Castor and Pollux”—the constellation Gemini, “the twins”. Those two together are a picture of the Church.
The rest of the record in Acts is of course concerned with the period of waiting for the return of Christ—and it is indeed the period in which we still live. We are still expecting the return of Christ, truly out of the clouds. That is why He disappeared into the clouds and will come out of the clouds, at the very same place, the Mount of Olives. That will happen at the end of the seventieth week of Daniel—that is, in those days when the Lord has officially taken up again the thread of His dealings with the Jewish people, to bring them to repentance. What we find recorded after this has in many ways to do with the time in which we now live. Historically that is so, of course, but these things are also illustrative of the situation in this present dispensation. These events have a figurative or spiritual meaning.
Verse 12: when “they were returned from the mount called Olivet”, the disciples come into the upper room, of the householder “Ploni Almoni”, which had been prepared for the celebration of the Passover of the Lord

Jesus with His disciples—that was at the Passover meal in the night in which the Lord Jesus was betrayed, before He was crucified. The interesting thing about that upper room is that this prepared place is a picture of the position of the Church in our days. The upper room is a room not on the ground floor, but one storey up, and is thus a representation of heaven. It is that place where the disciples also in these days remained, as it says here: “where they abode”. I am inclined, with some hesitation, to say: “where they lived”. The disciples were gathered there with the door shut “for fear of the Jews” (John 20:19). So they were not inside, and that is precisely the point. Christians belong to the Church; they are members of the Body of Christ—and they may be Jews by birth, but according to biblical standards they are then no longer “Jews” in that sense.

Scripture also speaks symbolically about the days in which we live—even already in Acts 1 our Church dispensation is sketched. In the upper room where they were gathered there were many lights. It is heaven; there is light. That is wisdom, that is revelation, and there the Lord makes Himself known.

Acts 1:13–14

13 And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.

14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

If this were merely bare history, then we would have here a rather trivial historian at work. Such details would not be interesting at all—unless they have a meaning on another level. The naming of these twelve disciples corresponds to the twelve tribes of Israel. Twelve in general expresses rule, dominion, glory. Hence this old world and mankind are ruled by time. We, in this three-dimensional world, are overruled by a fourth: time. Time is also a “measure”, but one over which we have no control.

That “they all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication” means that they shared the responsibility together—and therefore the rule. It is striking that the word “with one accord” suddenly appears here in Acts 1 and 2. In chapter 2 they are still “with one accord” together and “continuing stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine”. That is what the Church would do—as one whole, as one Body, one Church, carrying things together. That is what the donkey, as a picture of the Church, would do.

Acts 1:15–17

15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)

16 Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.

17 For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.

Peter stands up among the 120 and explains that Judas' betrayal and terrible death were no accident, but the fulfilment of Scripture spoken beforehand by the Holy Spirit through David. Judas had truly shared in the apostolic ministry, yet became the guide to those who arrested Jesus and ended in shame and destruction. The Psalms had foretold that his dwelling would be desolate and that his office must be given to another, so Peter concludes that someone must now take Judas' place as an official witness of Christ's resurrection. In the commentary, Judas is also seen as a picture of unbelieving Israel, stumbling over Christ the Stone, clinging to the Law instead of receiving grace—so that his fall and replacement illustrate both Israel's setting aside and God's wider plan to bring blessing through another people and through the Church.

In verse 16 special emphasis is laid on the position of Judas, but he no longer held that position. For what Peter is saying is: Judas is no longer here, and his position must be taken by someone else. He is replaced before we arrive at the day of Pentecost and the history really begins. What we then find is a detailed description of Judas. There are even (unpleasant) details that we do not find elsewhere. It says that he "burst asunder in the midst". That he "hanged himself" means that he took his own life. If you do not take it too literally, it simply means: he deprived himself of breath—that is strangling. I am inclined to read it in that way: he took his own life. How? The first answer is: he jumped from somewhere. That it also says here that he fell headlong and burst asunder has, of course, a definite meaning. It is a reference to prophecies in which it is said that Israel—and more specifically the Jewish people—would stumble over "the stone". It is Peter who later cites this in 1 Peter 2. They would stumble over "the stone of stumbling", "the rock of offence". That refers to several Old Testament passages, one of which is Isaiah 28, which in any case speaks of these times—the beginning of our dispensation, because in that chapter there is mention of "speaking with other tongues". That is announced there:
Isaiah 28:11
"For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people."
That is the description of the situation in our days. But concerning the Jewish people it is said that they would not believe. They would cling to the Law. The word of the LORD is to them nothing more than (verse 13):
Isaiah 28:13
"But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept;
line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; …"
That is a description of the Law and how it functions—and thus a good description of orthodox Judaism.
Judas stands for the Jewish people. Judas is Judah (Juda) in Hebrew. Statements in the Old Testament about what would happen to Israel—and more specifically to the Jewish people—are applied to the person of Judas. And conversely, so that we in Acts 1 should realise that it is just as much,

indeed even more, about Judah, the Jewish people, than about the individual man. In Matthew the Lord Jesus speaks of the stone. He says:
“…and whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.”
(Matthew 21:44, KJV)
When the Lord makes that statement about the stone and the being crushed, it is a statement about Judas the man, but also about the Jewish people as such. They would lose their life and be shattered, or scattered. They have stumbled over “the stone of stumbling”, “the rock of offence”. Isaiah prophesied of this:
Isaiah 8:14
“And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence
to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.”
“Sanctuary” is literally “holy thing”. Where it refers to property or a place it is a sanctuary/a holy place; otherwise, it is simply “a holy thing”. I will keep to “sanctuary”—something holy. He would be a sanctuary and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. He would be two things—two opposite things—for the two houses of Israel. And then once again: “for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem”. He would be a sanctuary and a stone of stumbling for the two houses of Israel. Normally this would mean that He is, for one house of Israel, “something holy”, and for the other house of Israel “a stone of stumbling and rock of offence”. The two houses are the ten tribes and the two tribes. He would be a gin and a snare for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. With Jerusalem you are dealing with the two tribes, for Jerusalem was either the capital of all Israel or, afterwards, of the two tribes, of Judah. Then you know immediately: the gin and snare are for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. So He is for the Jews a rock of stumbling and a stone of offence; from which it follows that He is a sanctuary for the ten tribes of Israel. It is stated implicitly, yet quite clearly. The two tribes would stumble over Him, but the ten tribes would regard Him as a sanctuary. That can only be because they come to faith.
Thus we are back in Acts 2, for Judas, a picture of the Jewish people, has to be replaced by someone else—from which it automatically follows that the one who comes in his place is a picture of the ten tribes of Israel. Here it is therefore announced that in our dispensation it is not the Jewish people who have the birthright among the nations, but the ten tribes of Israel. And that Church truth does not come from Judah, not out of the Jewish people, but out of Joseph.
The idea that Judas must be replaced is linked to two statements from the Psalms. First, Psalm 69, where the Lord is speaking in prayer:
Psalm 69:21
“They gave me also gall for my meat;
and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.”
We find this again in Matthew, Mark, and John, where it is cited in connection with the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. “They” are primarily the

Jews; it cannot have been Judas. The Jews gave Him gall for His meat. But then it says:

Psalm 69:22–23

22 “Let their table become a snare before them:
and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap.
23 Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not;
and make their loins continually to shake.”

“For the inhabitants of Jerusalem”—this links with the “table” language in Isaiah 28, which concerns the table of that unbelieving people. The table is a picture of fellowship, of unity, and thus of culture, of religion, of a way of life. A meal is life; the table is the expression of the way of life of those who sit at it. That is why we are to sit at “the Lord’s table”—figuratively, of course.

In Isaiah 28 it is said of the Jewish people that this table is utterly defiled and full of filth—“vomit and filthiness”, as the KJV puts it (Isaiah 28:8). And the Lord says: I have something to offer them, something good, something pleasant—but He cannot put it anywhere; there is no room on that table. They are not open to it; they do not want it. And that is correct, for within Judaism there is by definition no place for the Messiah. His coming would mean the end of Judaism. That is the whole problem. Judaism is built entirely around the expectation that the Messiah will one day come. Well, if He has come, then that means the end of that expectation and with it the end of Judaism. The Lord says: I have here the New Covenant—bread and wine. But there is no room on that table. They clung to the Law, but that is “that table”, and therefore it comes to nothing. Psalm 69 says: “Let their table become a snare before them…” The people would be trapped by it and die.

Paul cites this in:

Romans 11:9–10

9 “And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto them:
10 Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway.”

Psalm 69:23 had said:

Psalm 69:23

“Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not;
and make their loins continually to shake.”

We know this in various forms about the blinding of Israel: eyes that do not see, ears that do not hear. “Bow down their back alway,” says Romans 11: that means that they carry such a burden that they collapse under it; then the loins shake and the back bows down. Peter said of the Law:

Acts 15:10

“Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples,
which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”

Peter is a picture of the believers from among the Jews; Judas is a picture of the unbelieving people as a whole.

Then verses 24 and 25 of Psalm 69:

Psalm 69:24–25
24 “Pour out thine indignation upon them,
and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them.
25 Let their habitation be desolate;
and let none dwell in their tents.”
There was no royal “palace” as such among the Jews; if it is mentioned, it simply means that the entire land of Israel, the whole Jewish state, is regarded as a palace—for the people themselves are considered a royal people. It is rich imagery. If you take it less richly, you may say: their house, their land, their dwelling-place. Peter interprets it that way when he quotes it and applies it to Judas in Acts 1: “his bishoprick let another take” and “his habitation be desolate” (compare Acts 1:20). The original reads “their habitation… their tents”—plural—but Peter cites it in the singular with reference to Judas: “his habitation”. What is said in Psalm 69 about the Jewish people is in any case applied to the person of Judas. Through him we come back to the Jewish people who rejected the Lord Jesus. You could also say: betrayed Him—for that is what it was. They should have been faithful to Him. He was their King—from Judah, no less. But instead they rejected Him. That may rightly be called treachery. Judas betrayed the Lord Jesus, but it should dawn on us that this is not the main point. If he had not done it, the Lord Jesus would still have been handed over to be crucified—not by Judas, but certainly by the Jewish people. Nothing would remain of the position Israel held. The other passage is Psalm 109:5
“And they have rewarded me evil for good,
and hatred for my love.”
The position of the Jewish people—as the persecuted people in particular—is not without purpose. The Jewish people are, and remain, up to and including their tribulation in the seventieth week of Daniel, a visible object lesson to the world: showing what happens when you reject the Lord, when you do not know Him, when you reject God. God, Who is called by the Name of Israel—Jehovah, the God of Israel—well then, look at what that God does with Israel. And why, do you think, has He done this? There can be only one conclusion: because they have rejected Him. If there is one Name that the Jews do not pronounce, it is the Name of their own Lord—which demonstrates that they reject Him. Israel wants nothing to do with that Name. If one were to ask, as Scripture-based questions: how is it that things have gone so badly with this people through the centuries? On the one hand, they do not disappear; they do not assimilate, they do not dissolve, they are not exterminated—that is, in itself, quite remarkable—and yet they remain the oppressed, downtrodden people. How can that be? Because the Lord is not “with” them, because the people have rejected the Lord. Israel is the visible demonstration that God has given up the whole world (Romans 1). What is said here in the first instance about the Jewish people holds, in the second instance, for all mankind. That is the condition under which humanity lives. It will not remain so, of course—but it will remain so until the end of our dispensation.
Formerly one used to say: a Jew cannot come to faith, for he would not come to the righteousness of God; he would be blinded and hardened; the

table would be a snare and a trap (compare Romans 11). Nowadays the opposite is taught: a Jew does not need to come to faith. Because he is a Jew, he will be saved anyway. That comes via the route of the Calvinistic doctrine of election. There the question is always: is someone elect or not? If yes, then he is saved, or will be. Concerning Israel people say: but they are the chosen people—then surely they are, or will be, all saved? But you must read your Bible carefully. The point is that if someone remains a Jew in that sense, if he remains in Judaism, if they continue to bear that heavy yoke, if you keep sitting at that table full of filth, if you hold fast to the Law, then you do not come to the Lord Jesus. You cannot come to Him. That is not the intention. You must let go of it. You must come to the Lord and lay down the burdens. You put them away; you lay them down.

There are many who do come, lay their burdens down, then get up, take the burden back onto their shoulders and trudge on, saying: now we are saved, we have accepted the Lord Jesus. They imagine that, because they have become children of God, the Lord will now help them carry the burden. That is what is taught. Man lives under the Law, then comes to faith in the Lord Jesus, and then, out of gratitude, lives under the Law again—only now the Lord helps us to keep the Law. This is unfortunately quite a common message, even in so-called evangelical circles. But it is really rather absurd. The Lord would take away from us the burdens we cannot bear. We must let things go when we come to the Lord, however awkward or difficult we may find that. The first thing you must let go of is your religion.

Who invented religion? From whom do those “rudiments of the world” come? From “the prince of this world”. The Lord said: I have here two trees; from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you are not to eat, but from the tree of life you may eat. And then the devil came and said: “Hath God said? What has He said then? But He did not mean it like that.” That is the birth of religion. God has spoken, but He did not mean it like that. The religious leaders then say: “And now I will tell you what He did mean: you must eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” That is religion: the knowledge of good and evil, knowing what you may and may not do.

We must let go of the idea that by our own works, our own efforts, by doing our best as children of God, we can obtain life. What we ought to do is let our hearts be filled with the Word of God. That—says James—is what saves our practical lives, our souls, our walk. That is what changes our life: not the doing of works, but having the Word of God in the heart.

Colossians 3:16

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom;
teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

It is not religion, not law, that saves man or makes him pleasing to God, but faith. Receptiveness to the Word of God—that is what it is about, and therefore one must let go of the one in order to have part in the other. And that has always been the biblical message.

You know how it began with Abraham, the father of all believers and the father of all Israelites and Jews. What did the LORD say to him?
Genesis 12:1
“Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred,
and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee.”
The latest form of that same call is:
Hebrews 13:13
“Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.”
That is said to believers. There is no other way. We are to serve the Lord under the New Covenant. God has made us able—has made us competent—to be ministers of the New Covenant, and thus of Christ Himself. If we have to do with the devil at any point, it is precisely in this area. That is what he wants to prevent. If he cannot take your faith away from you, he can still render you ineffective, so that our practical life ends up having no value.
In Acts 1:16 Peter speaks about Judas and says: “Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.” Later in Acts it is said that the Lord Jesus was arrested and crucified, not under the leadership of Judas, but of the Jews. There the men of Jerusalem, the Jews, Israelite men, are addressed, and it says:
Acts 2:23
“Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,
ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.”
They did not do it with their own hands, but they certainly took the lead in it. They gave direction, they took the initiative—and Judas is the picture of that.
Peter says further of Judas in verse 17: “…for he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.” The word part here (often translated “lot”) does not mean “fate” or “chance”, but a portion—a specific share that was assigned to him. He had obtained the part, namely this ministry. It is an election from God’s side.
The position of the Jewish people—their clinging to the Law, their rejection of the Lord Jesus as the Messiah—forms part of the plan of God. He did not will it so in the sense of approving it, but God certainly knew that it would go this way, and He adjusted His plan accordingly, also as instruction and illustration for all, for you and for me—to show what becomes of a man when he clings to religion, to works of the Law, in order to be acceptable to God.
By living under the Law, the heart is by definition closed. But values—and then norms—that come from within cause a man to keep them. In that case he is still free, because it comes from within. That is living under grace, standing in that liberty. Ask the Galatians about it. Standing in liberty and living out of what is in the heart. For clarity’s sake: one should first fill the heart with the Word of God; then it cannot go wrong. But if that is not there, if the heart has no role, then things are imposed from outside.

A concept like faith has to do with the heart. That is the function of the heart. A biblical synonym for believing is “to lay to heart”, “to take to heart” (see Deuteronomy 30). But “Law” leaves the heart empty. Therefore Law is something completely different; it is the very opposite of faith.

One should therefore not use those words as if they were interchangeable. The point is simply this: if you do not have the one, then you have the other. There is no alternative; it cannot be otherwise. People who claim that man “needs” the Law assume that people are not believing and that their heart is empty. Where this is the case, with children, their hearts are not yet filled. That is why children are placed under the Law of their parents. That is the explanation in Galatians 4. The Law is for children. Children are under guardians and stewards until they are delivered from this by higher authority—“until the time appointed of the father” (Galatians 4:2, KJV). Then they are placed in liberty. After that they must find their own way—hopefully with a heart that in the meantime has been filled with values and norms. And if that is not the case, then later in life such a person will face serious problems, and there will always be a struggle between the Law imposed from outside and what actually lives in his heart—what he wants and what he is not allowed, or must do.

The Law was not given so that man would know how he ought to live. It was given to man because man wanted it. And then God said: Very well, on your own responsibility—but you will see what comes of it. Here it is. Later this is demonstrated even more clearly in King Saul. They wanted a king. Saul is a picture of the rule of the Law. It starts well; it looks impressive. He was a man of stature, respectable. That is how it is with the Law too. There is nothing wrong with it; it is holy and just and good, and it towers above mankind—by at least “a head”, so to speak. That was true of Saul as well. But it came to nothing. The man finally became utterly demonic. He was used by the devil. That is what the devil does with the Law. It would be splendid if man could keep the Law, but he cannot. Man ought to live from within. The Law suppresses him, frustrates him, takes him captive. That is also the expression used in Galatians 3. One should be free from it. But if one holds fast to it, then one does not come to faith.

Faith is a completely unknown concept. That is why the word is used as a label for “religion”, because people have absolutely no idea what to do with real faith. Trust in God and in His Word—that is faith. And then living out of that which the Word of God has planted in our hearts—that is living by faith in practice. People do not know what to do with that. That is what is demonstrated and what is at issue in Paul’s epistles and in his preaching. You see what it leads to. Paul lived under the Law—and where did it lead? He persecuted the Lord. “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” It is no coincidence that this man was also called Saul. Both Sauls demonstrate exactly the same thing: what comes of man if he clings to the Law.

Whoever lives under the Law does not come to faith—unless very radical things happen. But essentially it does not work—and that is what is depicted in the Jewish people and more specifically here in Judas. It is

visual teaching that God gives us. Hence: “he had obtained part of this ministry.”

Acts 1:18–20
18 Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity;
and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.
19 And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue,
Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood.
20 For it is written in the book of Psalms,
Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein:
and his bishoprick let another take.
What was the office of Judas? Just like the other eleven, it was his task to preserve the Word of God and then to preach it. In Acts 1 it is “to be a witness of the Lord Jesus”—and more particularly, to be “a witness of His resurrection”, for that is what it says. In verse 22 we read: “that one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.” Not only a witness of His resurrection, but especially a witness—i.e. in an official position as witness, officially appointed to that role. All those people who had seen the Lord Jesus could testify of His resurrection; there were many more than twelve. But there were twelve official witnesses—twelve who were invested by God with authority, as it were, and in that position had a function, an office. The office of witness.
The replacement of Judas in Acts 1 clearly expresses the replacement of the whole Jewish people. Israel as a whole was, officially, originally called and chosen to serve God and thus to be His witness—not only in words, but also in practical life. God brought Israel out of Egypt, and that event became known at once throughout the world. All the nations heard of it, so that the God of Israel, Jehovah, was recognised as a mighty God—a God Whom one had better keep as a Friend. God demonstrated His work in Israel.
The Jewish people have been removed from that official position, and in practice the Church, the Assembly, has taken that place. Indeed it has—one only needs to know which place we are speaking of. It is the place of that royal, priestly, chosen people. In practice that is the Church; but on the same level, it is also the other part of Israel—that which was lo-ammi (“not my people”) and was then made ammi (“my people”). Salvation, the priestly office, went from the two tribes to the ten tribes of Israel. The result of this is the calling of the Church from among the Gentiles.
This is so important because it immediately puts an end to the rather foolish notion among believers that Jews who have come to faith should have precedence—that they would automatically stand at the front of the queue.

> Hosea 4:6
> “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge:
> because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me:

seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children."

Here the dismissal of the Jewish people is announced. But in Hosea 2 it is already foretold that in that same period another people—the other part of Israel—would be appointed in their place. We find this reflected in Acts as well.

Judas received "thirty pieces of silver" (see Matthew 27:3–9). He then regretted it in a way and cast them into the temple. He wanted to give them back to the Sanhedrin. They said: "See thou to that" (Matthew 27:4, KJV)—in modern terms: that's your problem! So he went with those thirty pieces of silver in his purse and threw them into the temple. Then they had to decide what to do with those thirty pieces of silver. They bought a field with them, near Jerusalem, to bury Gentiles in. Gentiles may not be buried in a Jewish cemetery. So, because there were sometimes Gentiles in Jerusalem, and sometimes they died there, they bought a burial place. Such a thing is called a "field".

The interesting thing is that this field in itself is a beautiful expression of the Church in our days. Paid for by the Jews, for they have paid the price—according to Romans 11. "Have they stumbled that they should fall?" No, but "through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles." That salvation has come to us, and we as the Church have come into that priestly position—precisely because they have stumbled. The field, on which something would be sown and from which new life would spring forth, is a picture of the situation in our present time.

Acts 1:21–23

21 Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,
22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us,
must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.
23 And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

"…to be a witness with us of his resurrection." "With us"—that is lovely, because the whole point is that Judah is being replaced. Judas, the Jewish people, is replaced by another. They do not simply recruit some total stranger. He already belonged to them, but had played no leading role in the foreground during all those years. He was someone who had indeed been there and had experienced everything, but until now had not been named. Those are the two who are brought forward.

The one is called Joseph—you would already have expected that. The two tribes are called Judah, but the ten tribes are called Joseph. Scripture sometimes speaks of the "Joseph nations", also "Ephraim nations". The people are named after the firstborn—just as all Israel is named after the firstborn "Israel". But after the division of the kingdom it is called the two-tribe kingdom, named after the one with the greatest rights in it, namely Judah (including Benjamin and part of Levi). Judah is the tribe to whom the kingship was assigned.

The ten tribes were called either Israel, or Joseph, or Ephraim—after the firstborn among the ten tribes. That is Ephraim, for he is the tribe with the birthright among Israel. Ephraim received the birthright and then disappeared, together with the ten tribes, into the Assyrian captivity. They have been a Gentile people for a very long time—more than 2,500 years. When, in the days of Acts, the Gospel—salvation—was taken away from the Jews, where did it go? To the Gentiles—and thus to the great Gentile world empire. Where did it therefore end up? In Rome. And the question is: with whom? That is a little harder—but I have already mentioned a parallel, an analogy. In the earlier history they went down to Egypt, to Pharaoh in Egypt, but they actually came to Joseph.

In Acts salvation is given to the Gentiles. Where does one therefore arrive? In the great Roman Empire, in Rome. But with whom? We do not read this explicitly, but you only need to pay careful attention—like Joseph's brothers in those days. It came to the British king, the heir of Joseph, and to Jeroboam and all those who followed that line, to King Caradoc.

Salvation went to the Gentiles in general, but to which Gentiles? To a specific people, says Moses—and Paul cites him (see Acts 13:47 and Romans 10:19). So we ask: which people then? And there can be only one answer: it must be those old ten tribes of Israel. They are not called Israel; they are Gentiles. But there it will come.

That is what is illustrated at the beginning of Acts in several ways, and in this account in Acts 1 even twice: once via the person of Judas and then via Matthias—but also via "Akeldama", the field of blood.

God had previously appointed the Jewish people, but they became unbelieving and were then dismissed. Who would then be eligible, within the biblical and legal framework, to serve the Lord in place of the Jewish people? I have always thought: you may indeed take it away from the Jews, but then to give it straight to the Gentiles just like that… Surely you would first have to offer it to that other part of Israel. For the Messianic promises were made to all twelve tribes of Israel.

If the ten tribes then did not want to live under the Law, fine—that is finished. The Law has been ended. The New Covenant breaks in. But to say, "The Jews do not want it, so we will immediately give it to the Gentiles," has always seemed to me a rather far-reaching step. You would surely first offer it to the ten tribes. But then: they are Gentiles—and they are the most important among the Gentiles, so there is nothing wrong with that. It is given to the Gentiles. That is exactly what has happened. Those ten tribes must be somewhere, for Scripture teaches explicitly and in many places that the ten tribes will emerge again in the days of the return of Christ. The New Covenant ought first to be offered to them. And that is what happened—specifically to the Britons, to be precise. First in and to Britain, to Caradoc's kinsman Arviragus, the man of Glastonbury—then still called Avalon. It reached the Britons by two different routes. And this history here confirms that again. It is simply not well known.

In Britain church and state are still directly linked. The British monarch is still "Defender of the Faith". The British sovereign is called head of the Church—but of course that is not actually true; that is simply the Lord, and they know that there too. The title is given to the British monarch, but she

(or he) knows better. Not “Head of the Church”, but “Defender of the Faith”. Church and crown belong together. How come? It is the first nation which, officially as a nation, at governmental level—at the level of the royal house—came to faith. Officially. That is not up for debate at all. According to Roman Catholic records, the Britons were the first nation that came to faith. Already in the days of the apostles, the Gospel was preached to the Britons and Britain was Christianised—i.e. the nation was converted to Christianity.

Verse 23: “…Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus.” We keep bumping into “a Joseph” in the New Testament—again and again. “Ah, Joseph…” and then he disappears from view. It is not meant to be emphasised so heavily. It is about the hidden work which the Lord is doing in our present time—not revealed to the world, but to believers. One of our blessings is that God has made known unto us in Christ the mystery of His will (Ephesians 1:9)—not to the world, but specifically to us.

“Barsabas” means something like “son of the sabbath” (bar sabbat in Aramaic). Son of the sabbath—and thus heir of it, for that is what “son” implies: heir. Son of rest—sabbath stands for rest. Heir of the rest. He is the one who has entered into rest. You can immediately recognise Church truth in that. For after we have been delivered from the Law, and thus after the sabbath has been declared history and placed in the museum, we are no longer “in the sabbath”. We have entered “the first day of the week”—the day after the sabbath, beyond it. We are sons of the sabbath. The sabbath, in a broad sense, stands for this whole old creation which we have left behind. We have been delivered from this old creation, and we are in Christ a new creature. For the only thing that has validity there is a new creation in Christ, as both 2 Corinthians 5 and Galatians 6 say.

“Joseph” is a beautiful name. In full it is translated as: “Jehovah shall add to me”, or more fully: “Jehovah shall add to me another son”—as in Genesis 30:24, where Joseph is born and named. Shortened, the name Joseph means: “to add”, “increase”, “extend”. So far as the name Joseph is applied to the ten tribes, that is very clear. The Jews have remained a relatively small people; but the so-called “Joseph nations” have spread over the whole world through the centuries. They have grown great. Also spiritually, only few from the Jewish people have come to faith and been added to the Church. The majority of the members of the Church come from Joseph—from the ten tribes of Israel.

Verse 23: “…who was surnamed Justus.” Tsaddik in Hebrew—a righteous man, Justus. No one can truly be called that in himself. There is no actual “Justus” as such. “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10, KJV). We as believers are justified in Christ. So if the term applies to anyone, it is to us believers in this present dispensation.

At His birth the Lord Jesus was legally the son of a Joseph. Directly after His resurrection He is again the Son of Joseph—in the sense that He stood under Joseph’s protection and care in type. After the ascension this “Joseph” took the apostles into his care, so to speak: he officially brought the Gospel to Britain, straight as an arrow. Joseph knew who the ten tribes were, just as others in those days knew. I have two arguments for that. First, James addresses his epistle:

James 1:1
"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting."

Then he must have known who and where they were. Second, when the apostle Paul is a prisoner and stands before his judge (Acts 26:7), he speaks of the twelve tribes.

The Celts in Britain were indeed expecting someone who would come—who would be born of a virgin. The ten tribes officially had no writings, for wisdom was not to be written down. They remembered where the Word of God had been and how it had come to them. They also knew that they did not believe it—but at least they did not put anything else in its place, such as confessional writings instead of the Bible. Then they preferred to have no writings at all. They only began to write after they had come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Of the Celts people in fact know almost nothing—and that is just as well, for what happened was that the Celtic peoples, more or less en bloc, passed over into Christianity. They became Christians with a complete transformation of their culture. They were "transformed by the renewing of their mind" (Romans 12:2, KJV).

Verse 23: "…and they appointed two." The other candidate was Matthias, Mattathia, Mattathias, which means "gift of Jehovah", "gift of the LORD". He is not mentioned again, except that it is said that he received that position. Matthias is a picture of the ten tribes of Israel.

You also find Matthias (Mattathias) in Luke 3. That is not the same man, but the same name. In Luke 3:24–25 we read: "…the son of Matthat, which was the son of Levi, which was the son of Melchi, which was the son of Janna, which was the son of Joseph, which was the son of Mattathias…" That is another Joseph and another Matthat/Matthias. It is about the typology and the meaning attached to the names. So even if you did not have the name Joseph in Acts 1, but you did have the name Mattathias, you would, via the concordance, arrive in Luke 3, where he is the father of Joseph. Along both routes the name Joseph appears.

That is nice, because only one had fallen away, yet two figures are introduced. That is fitting, because proportionally Joseph indeed counts for two among the tribes of Israel. That is also why in Scripture we do not have twelve, but thirteen tribes. Jacob had twelve sons, yet there are thirteen tribes of Israel, because Joseph counts as two. Both his sons became tribal heads, founding tribes in the literal sense: Manasseh and Ephraim. And the younger was promoted above the elder; Ephraim received the birthright above Manasseh.

Where the birthright within the tribes of Israel was given to Joseph, it therefore came to Ephraim. The firstborn in Scripture is the one who, if there is a priesthood, inherits the priesthood; if there is a kingship, inherits the kingship; and also receives a double portion (see Deuteronomy 21:15–17). He counts for two. That law is not just arbitrary; it is at the same time a prophecy—namely, that both out of Judah and out of Joseph (the wife of Jehovah, divided in two) something would be brought forth.

Although the first would be born from the less-loved wife, he would still receive the birthright. Thus it really is also about the Church. The "hated wife" stands for the ten tribes of Israel. They never served the Lord; they

were dismissed early on—but nevertheless, officially, the Church comes forth from them. Or put differently: that people is the first to come to faith, with the result that out of them the Church arises, which is then considered a “son” of that wife of the ten tribes of Israel, and that son indeed receives the double portion.
In this connection it is interesting to recall the parable of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 21 about a father who had two sons. He said to them: “Go work to day in my vineyard” (Matthew 21:28), which is a picture of the Kingdom of God, of salvation as such. One son says: “I go, sir”—but he does not go. The other says: “I will not”—but afterwards he repents and goes. The one who says “yes” but does not do it is a picture of the Jewish people. The ten tribes said “no”, but do it.
Then follows the other parable in the same chapter, about the husbandmen in the vineyard—the wicked husbandmen. That parable ends with the statement that the Kingdom will be taken from them and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (Matthew 21:43). That is the same story. In verse 31 the Lord says:

> Matthew 21:31
> “Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.”

Publicans and harlots in the New Testament are pictures of the ten tribes of Israel. Publicans and harlots have this in common: they are unfaithful. Publicans were in the service—collecting taxes—of the Romans, the occupying power. They were therefore branded unfaithful.

Acts 1:24–25
24 And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men,
shew whether of these two thou hast chosen,
25 That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell,
that he might go to his own place.
We already met the phrase “part of this ministry” in verse 17, in connection with Judas, who stumbled upon—or over—the Stone and was broken. That was “the part of his ministry”. Now another takes his bishoprick, his overseer’s office, and the same term is used. Which ministry? That of being a witness, as in verse 22. Here in verse 25 it appears again, and now it is called “apostleship”. That tells us what the word apostle and apostleship entail.
“Apostle” is a Greek term which the translators have simply left as it is. Literally it means “one who is sent”—a missionary, messenger, someone sent. Yet in Scripture the word apostle is not used for everyone who is sent. That is why the translators did not render it as “messenger” or “envoy”, but kept the Greek word to preserve its specific biblical content. An apostle is indeed someone who is sent, but sent by the Lord Jesus Himself. I do not merely mean “by Christ” in a general sense, or “by God”, or “by the Spirit”—for then one could use the term of others too. What matters is that the apostle has known the Lord Jesus Himself as Man on earth—or at least as appearing on earth. That even holds for the apostle

Paul, for the Lord did appear to him—at least once, and if you ask me, several times. That was after His resurrection, but it was nevertheless a real earthly appearance. Paul therefore describes himself as “the least of the apostles” (1 Corinthians 15:9)—literally the last.
But the apostle must be a witness. Witnessing means telling what one has seen, looked upon, handled—with thanks to 1 John 1. In short, things that one has perceived or experienced oneself, with whatever senses.
So far as we are witnesses of Christ, the term cannot really be used in the strict sense for us. We take the word over from Scripture, but its original use belongs to the apostles. They could testify of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus—perhaps not of the event itself, but they had seen the risen Christ. They had known the Lord and were certain that He had risen, because they had seen Him, met Him, spoken with Him after His resurrection. They could testify to this in the legal sense.
I do not recall ever having read that you and I are to “bear witness” of the Lord Jesus in that same strict sense. We may well bear witness of ourselves—that is possible: what we have experienced, how we know the Lord, what change that has brought in our life. If you stretch the term, you might still call that “witnessing”. But what we certainly should do is speak the Word of God, and give an answer—“a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). Speak the word of truth.
They were sent by the Lord Jesus Himself. From that apostleship Judas fell away, “that he might go to his own place.” The place of Judah is taken by Matthias. The place of the Jewish people, of Judah so to speak, is taken by Joseph—in practice, by what you might call the son of Joseph, namely the Church.

Acts 1:26
“And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.”
“Numbered with” or “chosen with common consent” does not mean by majority vote, but with agreement, with assent. They simply said: obviously, we agree; we accept this—this is how it is. Later on in Acts we encounter the same thing with the so-called “appointment of elders”. Scripture says that God appoints them, or that the Holy Spirit does so, and believers are only expected to consent—to agree with the situation as it is, and to accept what God gives.
God gives to the Church “some, pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11). God does not do this in a democratic way.
At the beginning of this Bible book, which speaks about how things continue after the resurrection of Christ, and about the preaching of the Gospel and the formation of the Church, it is set out—albeit under a veil, but for us very recognisable—what the real situation is in our present time. Although it was not yet arranged in the days of Acts 2, it is already stated before Acts 2 how it would be. The outcome of the story is, as it were, given in advance.
You may think that far-fetched. But I would say: it is not far-fetched at all, because I have also read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and they are constructed in exactly the same way. They already tell, in the first chapter,

how it ends—which I consider a very good habit. For if it does not end well, I do not want to read it at all. But Scripture tells us the good end beforehand. Genesis 1 also tells us how it ends: it ends with mankind “in the image and likeness of God”. Only, it would take a few years before it was so. That makes the story exciting.
It is the same in Acts. In Acts 1 it is said: it will be taken away from Judah —the overseer’s office, the apostleship—and given to Joseph, to the ten tribes of Israel. From them the Church will arise. With keen interest we then read through the book of Acts—and at the end we are indeed with Paul, from the tribe of Benjamin, in Rome, specifically in the British palace in Rome, where the apostle says: “Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it” (Acts 28:28).
But in fact we already knew that in Acts 1.

Acts 2:1–2
And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind,
and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

Peter’s Pentecost sermon explains that the strange signs of wind, fire and tongues are the beginning of the great outpouring of the Spirit prophesied by Joel for the last days. He proclaims that Jesus of Nazareth, whom his hearers had rejected and crucified, was God’s approved Man, and that His death took place according to God’s determinate counsel. God raised Him from the dead, as David had foretold, and exalted Him to His own right hand, giving Him the position of Lord and Christ. The outpoured Spirit is proof that Jesus now reigns in heaven. Convicted, the crowd asks what to do, and Peter calls them to repent, to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ, to receive forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit – a promise for Israel, their children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord will call.

The Day of Pentecost

1. The setting – the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4)
   - On the day of Pentecost (50 days after the Resurrection), the disciples are:
     - All together,
     - In one place,
     - With one accord – a picture of the unity and nature of the Church.
   - Suddenly there is:
     - A sound from heaven “as of a rushing mighty wind” – a sign of the invisible, irresistible work of the Spirit (wind/spirit = pneuma).

    - It fills all the house where they are sitting – the house representing the House / Temple of God, i.e. the Church as God's dwelling.
    - Tongues like fire appear and rest on each of them – they are all filled with the Holy Ghost and begin to speak "with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance".
- These tongues are real languages, and the content is "the wonderful works of God" – in other words, the new, heavenly salvation of the Church being proclaimed in Gentile languages

2. Peter stands up and explains what is happening (Acts 2:14–21)

- Peter, filled with the Spirit, addresses "Ye men of Judaea… Ye men of Israel".
- He explains that the disciples are not drunk, but that what is happening is the beginning of what was prophesied by Joel:
    - God will "pour out of [His] Spirit upon all flesh" in "the last days".
    - Sons and daughters will prophesy; young and old will receive visions and dreams.
    - This whole New Testament period, from the Resurrection to the Return of Christ, is the time of the Spirit's outpouring.
- Joel also speaks of cosmic signs (sun darkened, moon as blood) before "the great and notable day of the Lord" – pointing to the end of the seventy weeks of Daniel, the coming of Christ in glory.
- The key line, already valid now, is:

"And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

3. Jesus of Nazareth: His life, death, and resurrection (Acts 2:22–24)

Peter centres his sermon on Jesus of Nazareth:

1. His life
    - "A man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you."
    - His miracles proved that God Himself was working through Him as His prophet and servant.
2. His death
    - He was delivered "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" – His death was not an accident, but part of God's legal, redemptive plan (the "counsel" of God).
    - Yet Peter plainly tells Israel:

"Ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

    - They are responsible for rejecting and crucifying the very One whom God sent.
3. His resurrection
    - "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death."
    - Death could not hold Him:
        - Not because He simply "used His own divine power",
        - But because God had promised in Scripture (e.g. Psalm 16) that His Holy One would not see corruption.

    - God’s Word had said He would rise – so it was impossible that He should be held by death.

4. Peter’s use of David’s Psalms (Acts 2:25–32)
Peter shows that David was actually speaking prophetically about Christ, not about himself:

- He quotes Psalm 16:
    - “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell… neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.”
- Peter argues:
    - David died and his tomb is still with us – so these words cannot refer to David.
    - As a prophet, David spoke of “the resurrection of Christ”.
    - God swore to David that of the fruit of his loins He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne – and the Resurrection is the first fulfilment of that.

So:
“This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.”

5. Exaltation: Jesus made Lord and Christ (Acts 2:33–36)
Peter then moves from resurrection to exaltation:

- The risen Jesus is:
    - Exalted by the right hand of God.
    - Has received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost.
    - And has now “shed forth this” which the crowd sees and hears – the outpouring of the Spirit.

He then cites Psalm 110:1:
“The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,
Until I make thy foes thy footstool.”

- David did not ascend into heaven, so he cannot be speaking of himself.
- He speaks of his Lord – the Messiah, the Son of David.
- This proves that the Messiah’s present position is:
    - Not yet on the earthly throne of David in Jerusalem,
    - But on the throne of God in heaven – at God’s right hand.

Peter’s climactic conclusion:
“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly,
that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified,
both Lord and Christ.”
So:

- Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified Man, has been made:
    - Christ – the anointed King and Messiah,
    - Lord – given the Name above every name, the very Name of Jehovah, so that:

“At the name of Jesus every knee should bow… and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord…”

6. The reaction and Peter’s call (Acts 2:37–39)

- The hearers are “pricked in their heart” and cry:

“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

- Peter’s answer:

1. “Repent” – a change of heart and mind towards God and towards Christ.
2. “And be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ”
    - Each believer is personally called to confess Christ in baptism, acknowledging God’s judgement and identifying with Christ’s death and resurrection.
3. “For the remission of sins” and “ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”
    - Forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit belong to all who turn to Christ.

- The promise, says Peter, is:
    1. “Unto you” (the Jews listening in Jerusalem),
    2. “And to your children” (the next generations of Israel),
    3. “And to all that are afar off” – those far from Israel, both ten tribes and Gentiles,
    4. “Even as many as the Lord our God shall call.”

This opens the door to the whole New Testament era: salvation
This opens the door to the whole New Testament era: salvation and the Spirit for all whom God calls, from Israel first and then to the nations.

The details in Acts 2 express, in one way or another, the character of the special dispensation that began with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and continues—so to speak—until His return. In this period there is a very specific work of God, which will be completed in the days of the return of Christ, because from that time, or in those days, the Lord will do another work—a work concerning Israel and the nations here on earth. In our present days the Lord is therefore not doing a work among Israel and the nations.
Pentecost means “50”. The day of Pentecost—pente means fifty. The fiftieth day. A feast was attached to it. This does not appear in Greek; that is why the translators printed it in italics. From when does one count fifty days? Pentecost is also called the “Feast of Weeks”. The instructions (for example, Leviticus 23) are roughly as follows: beginning from Passover one should count seven weeks. The word week itself means “seven”; so one counts seven sevens, $7 \times 7 = 49$. When that is complete, one arrives at the fiftieth day. Fifty days—depending on whether one counts inclusively or exclusively—but the meaning is simple: the calculation begins on the first day of the week. From that point you count seven weeks, and the day thereafter (in inclusive counting) is again the first day of the week, and that is Pentecost.
The Passover feast is in reality the Feast of the Firstfruits sheaf—the resurrection of Christ—and that was on a first day of the week. That is why Christian tradition always places Easter on a first day of the week. Among the Jews it is not so: they celebrate Pesach, and they begin on the fifteenth. But the point for us is according to Leviticus 23:15:
“…Ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath…”

From the day after the sabbath (the waving of the firstfruits sheaf) the counting begins. This is roughly from Easter onwards. We count from that first day of the week.
Leviticus continues:
“…from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete:
Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days…”
7 × 7 + 1 = 50 according to the Bible.
“…then ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD.”
This we know as Pentecost.
The period in which the disciples had to wait in Jerusalem from the Resurrection amounts to fifty days in total.
It is still Pentecost—because Pentecost symbolises our entire dispensation. Christ is gathering for Himself a people from among the nations for His Name (see Acts 15:14). Believers become members of His Body. Just as the firstfruits sheaf is waved “before the face of the LORD”—as it were, before the throne of God—so it happens with the Church. Not only has the Lord ascended into heaven, but we are—or will be—or are already—seated with Him in the heavenlies. All three are true. The wave-offering is so called because it is “moved”. “Made alive” means that it rises before God—it is presented in heaven. That applies to the Lord Jesus, but in the second instance it applies to the Church. For we are:
“…blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” (Ephesians 1)
We are moved, so to speak, “before the face of the Lord”. We are in God’s hand. We have been made alive—not for the world—but for God. We are raised with Christ and seated in the heavenlies, and we should seek and set our minds on heavenly things (Colossians 3:1). I did not invent this—otherwise I would apologise for it—it is simply in the Bible. We have become citizens of heaven. Our citizenship is in heaven; that is our place (Philippians 3:20; Ephesians 1:20; 2:6). We have the life of Christ—the Spirit of Christ—in us. That is exactly what Peter preaches in Acts 2. He says that when a man believes, he receives that same Spirit which the Lord Jesus also received. And therefore, whoever believes receives the same life that the Lord Jesus received: resurrection life—eternal life. That is literally stated beginning in Acts 2:33.
We (believers in the Church of God) form part of the two loaves of firstfruits—we are the firstfruits of the harvest. The Church consists of firstfruits—firstborn. Therefore the Lord also said to the Jews: “Many that are first shall be last” and “the last shall be first” (e.g. Matthew 19:30). We are a church of firstborn, and on the ground of the birthright we are promoted to heaven. That was never promised to Abraham. To him was promised a new creation—a city which hath foundations (Hebrews 11:10)—a new heaven and a new earth. Were Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah and all the other Old Testament believers (Hebrews 11) born again? No, for:
“…the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified.” (John 7:39)

They received later the right to become children of God (John 1:12). That is the difference between Old Testament and New Testament believers. That which was promised to the Old Testament believers they have not yet obtained. Abraham, Isaac, Sarah, Enoch, Noah and the rest were promised a land on this earth—undoubtedly a new earth—but not heaven. For not they, but we, have the birthright—although we came to faith later. In the opening of Acts 2, “when the day of Pentecost was fully come”, the entire Church truth is already described. On that day they were to wait. “Tarry ye in Jerusalem” (Luke 24:49). The statement in Acts 2:1 is a wonderful expression of the nature of the Church itself:
“…they were all with one accord in one place.”
Then in verse 2:
“…there came suddenly from heaven a sound…”
“SUDDENLY” means “unexpectedly” in the King James vocabulary. It has to do with the unforeseen. This is a description of the situation of the Church in our days. It was not to be expected—humanly speaking—but it came, and it remains. It comes from heaven and is beyond prediction and observation. What comes? A sound—literally a voice, for sound and voice are interchangeable. A sound with a message. Something directly from heaven—from God Himself. He Himself does this. He is the prophet; He is the witness—the faithful and true Witness. He does His work in our days. It is a sound, a voice, a word from heaven—suddenly.
“…as of a rushing mighty wind…”—that means with great power. But actually the word “mighty” here does not merely mean “strong”, but irresistible power—overpowering, something against which no one can stand. So: an irresistible, driving wind—a wind that passes through. What such a sound would be like—I have no idea. The point is how it is described. It is inspired Scripture, so the description is clear enough. “Wind” is of course simply pneuma—spirit. Wind and spirit are the same word. So this is a representation of the work of the Spirit—also because it is the day of Pentecost. It is the work of the Spirit. In another sense one could simply say: it is an invisible work—for Spirit is life. One of the synonyms of spirit is “life”. Another description is: everything invisible. Spirit is by definition unseen. It is our word “gas”—and it is a message, a voice, which we do not literally hear, but which most certainly is there. Only here, in this sign, it is symbolically made audible.
I refer again to John 3. “The wind bloweth where it listeth…” That passage about being born of the Spirit. The wind blows—if it is someone, we say “blows”; if it is something, we say “moves” or “wafts”. The wind blows where it will, and you hear the sound thereof, but you know not whence it comes or whither it goes. You cannot see it. You only know that it happens; you are aware that it happens; but how, why, and where it goes—you do not know, unless it is revealed to you by God. That is precisely what is expressed here: suddenly, from heaven, a sound as of a mighty, driving wind.
“…and it filled all the house…”—that is the House of God. Or the House of the LORD—which we are (Hebrews 3). The Church, the House of God. Another word for “House of God” is “Temple”. That is what the believers in Corinth are told:

“Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?” (1 Corinthians 6:19)
Or simply:
“…an habitation of God through the Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:22)
That is the house in which they were sitting. And it is our house.
“Where they were sitting” speaks of position—the position of rest which a believer occupies. In the sense that we have ceased from works—works of the Law, Scripture says, because that is literally what is written—but in fact it means religious works. And yet we work—we walk in good works, which God has prepared beforehand (Ephesians 2:10). But on the other hand we have entered rest and we sit. In the house that “was filled with this wind”, the Spirit of God—Christ—does His work. Outside of it, He does not. The Lord does no work in the world. The Lord works in the Church. Afterwards upon Israel. And ultimately He will work among the nations.

Acts 2:3–4
And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues,
as the Spirit gave them utterance.
The disciples already received the Holy Spirit when the Lord said to them:
“…Receive ye the Holy Ghost.” (John 20:22)
That was not on the first Pentecost, but on the first Easter—the day of His resurrection from the dead. Receiving the Holy Spirit is completely the same as being born again. We are regenerated, not by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but by the resurrection of Christ:
“…God… hath begotten us again… by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (1 Peter 1:3)
Or in other words:
“…you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins…” (Ephesians 2)
To be “filled with the Holy Spirit” is not the same as being baptised with or in the Holy Spirit (Spirit baptism). There is only one passage—out of the seven passages where the expression occurs—which actually explains it. The first six references all read identically: “John indeed baptized with water…”, or John said:
“…I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.” (Mark 1:8)
This is repeated six times, including Acts 1:5:
“…For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.”
All of these statements come from John the Baptist.
We have one statement where it is explained: 1 Corinthians 12 says:
“…For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body…”
“…and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”
Or: “we have all been drenched with the same Spirit.”
We are permeated with it. That is the meaning.
The translators unfortunately did not grasp this immediately.
By a fatal misunderstanding, they thought that “baptism” primarily

referred to sprinkling infants. But the word baptize—especially the word used here—is not merely “immersion”, but much stronger: to saturate by immersion. A shorter word is “dip” or “immerse”—bapto—but baptizō means to immerse until fully soaked—like a sponge plunged into water until completely saturated. It is an image of new birth. We are given a share in the life of Christ—but the point is that we should be filled with the Holy Spirit.

That they would be filled should be their pursuit, but they would be filled with the Holy Spirit—and that is something else.

What do they do afterwards?

“…Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, began to speak.”

What does the Spirit do? He speaks. The Spirit inspires and brings forth Word. That is the issue. Therefore I prefer to read the verse leaving out the middle phrase:

“They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak.”

Then, if I must read more of the verse:

“…they began to speak, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

The final detail I read is:

“…with other tongues.”

They spoke as the Spirit gave them to speak.

The Spirit is the outworking of the Being of God—His operative power. The first thing manifested is Word. Peter suddenly knows precisely what he must say. That is an outworking of “being filled with the Spirit”—the manifestation of that Spirit. It is unusual, because by definition the Spirit works in secret. They began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. They spoke the wonderful works of God (verse 11). This equals such expressions as: the great salvation, the greatest promises, and the better promises. These are statements concerning the salvation of you and me—the Church—which is recorded in heaven. Our heavenly position rests on the birthright of the Church. The Church is first; Israel in the future is second. Which automatically means that all believers down to the return of Christ, or otherwise to the conversion of Israel, partake of the heavenly position of the Church.

Such an expression as “the wonderful works of God” is a reference to the salvation of the Church. That is what they speak of—even before a single word is spoken in Aramaic—or Hebrew. The native inhabitants of Jerusalem could not even understand it. Those who understood the Gentile languages, because they had lived among the Gentiles, understood it. And of them it is written:

“…we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.”

How could they know that? They did not know—but this was recorded afterwards, probably years later, by someone who did know, namely Luke, as far as we know. Luke summarises and says: “They said: How hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born, the wonderful works of God.” They spoke of the mysteries that were revealed. It cannot be otherwise.

Speaking in tongues here—by the disciples—was prophecy, because it says: “…as the Spirit gave them utterance.” If the Spirit gives you something to speak, it is by definition prophecy. Since this was after the

resurrection of Christ, it must be New Testament prophecy. That is a category of its own. For Old Testament prophecy is by definition directed to the coming of the Messiah and everything connected with that. The unique feature of New Testament prophecy is that people inspired by God explain Old Testament prophecy. The apostles are prophets—foundation-layers of the Church (Ephesians 2:20). Look at what they wrote and compare it with the Old Testament prophets. In the New Testament you do not read: “Thus saith the LORD”, but rather: “As it is written…” Then the veil is lifted from an Old Testament text.
New Testament prophecy is the inspired explanation of Old Testament prophecy, because part of it was hidden. Where the apostles removed the covering from Old Testament prophecy, we no longer need prophecy. It stands written. When God has spoken everything, He stops speaking. He has written His Book—that is it. When we come to the Lord later, we will not say: “Why did You not speak to me from time to time?” Then He will say: “I gave you a Book!”
The point is that at first the wonderful works of God—and thereby Church truth—were proclaimed in familiar Gentile languages. There were those who understood it—quite many—and this is the illustration of the whole course of New Testament history. For in Acts 1 and 2 we are at the beginning of our dispensation and also at the beginning of the entire New Testament history—the beginning of the last days—in which the Gospel will be preached, people will be born again through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
The first category is the Church, and it is gathered from among the Gentiles. That is what appears here—and that is what speaking in tongues means. There is only one chapter in the Bible that says anything about it—1 Corinthians 14—and it is extremely negative. Paul says: what am I to do with speaking in tongues? No one understands it. It is pleasant only for yourself. In my opinion this is one of those ironic and humorous statements of the Bible: he that speaketh in a tongue edifieth himself. Then you can display a fine spiritual face to yourself—you can rise in your own estimation. He builds himself up. But the Bible says that this is not permissible.

In Joel we read: “… but afterwards it shall come to pass,” so that you know: “afterwards” simply refers to the future. At some point. Somewhere, it shall come to pass that “I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh.” In the last days, therefore. It is the hallmark of these days that God will pour out of His Spirit upon all flesh. When the last days begin, He begins with this, and when the last days are completed, then that Spirit has been poured out upon all flesh. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is not a single event; rather, it happens throughout that period. Even in the thousand years, when people will be born, they must also be born again. They too must then receive that Spirit, because they do not possess it by nature. Even then it applies that when someone comes to faith, he receives that Spirit. This continues until the Last Day. Then it is finally completed.
It is called “pouring out” or “outpouring”. Spirit is not matter, it is not material. Because that Spirit has no form, it is represented as liquid. It

could also be represented as gas – that is essentially the meaning of the word. Spirit, gas – but you cannot see it. If you want to have an image of it, then you imagine the Spirit as a liquid. The Bible does the same. He will "pour out His Spirit upon all flesh." Beginning at Jerusalem. That is written in Zechariah 12. Beginning, of course, with the Messiah. Therefore, on the one hand, what we call the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, or the coming of the Spirit, or the coming of eternal life, is promised. On the other hand, the coming of the Messiah is promised, which is the same as the coming of the Spirit.
The first is always the Firstfruits, the Firstborn. That is the last Adam, the second Man, the Messiah, Christ, the Lord Jesus. That was what was waited for. And there He was. He rose from the dead and said something like: "Peace be unto you." (cf. John 20) That is the announcement of the New Covenant of Peace, and afterwards He said: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." (John 20:22) That is indeed what one might expect on that resurrection day. Afterwards, "beginning at Jerusalem, and then Samaria, and the ends of the earth." Beginning with the Jews, then the ten tribes of Israel, and then to the Gentiles. In that order. But in practice, of course, that Spirit is only given to those who believe, because it is a blessing from God.
Joel 2:28–32
28 And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions:
29 And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My Spirit.
30 And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke.
31 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD come.
32 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the Name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.
Up to this point Peter quoted this Scripture passage in Acts 2. From the context in Joel we arrive at the events at the end of the 70th week of Daniel. That is the synchronisation point in the prophetic word: the Second Coming of Christ. It is accompanied by the fall of Jerusalem and the appearance of the Lord upon the Mount of Olives. The darkening of sun, moon and stars is found repeatedly in Joel, also in chapters 3 and 4, and likewise in other prophecies. They are characteristic of that moment: the end of the 70th week of Daniel. Thus you find it also, to name an important Scripture passage, in Revelation 6. The event marks the time. The Bible does not give years. Events are described, and then you know what time it is. That is why this event is used.
The matters in Joel 2, in which the New Covenant is announced, are mentioned with reference to the coming of the Messiah for Israel. It takes place in New Testament times. I have Daniel 9 in mind: "Seventy weeks are determined upon thee and upon thy people and upon thy holy city,

and then comes the Messiah.” Church truth is not contained there. Our dispensation is not mentioned in that prophecy. It prophesies of a judgment upon unbelieving Israel, and then the appearing of the Messiah and therefore the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and so forth. Verses 28 and 29 of Joel 2 have already begun to be fulfilled since the resurrection of Christ. And it is still being fulfilled daily. Where people come to faith, they receive that Holy Spirit. Do they then prophesy? No, that is not what it says. It only states that in those days, in which these things are fulfilled, there would indeed be prophecy. We know of apostles and prophets in Acts. Besides the apostles there were also other prophets. That was very necessary. All the New Testament books still had to be written. The mystery had to be revealed, and that took place by definition through prophets. Only it did not remain so. There are two chapters in the Bible that explicitly set out that prophecy has ceased: 1 Corinthians 13 and 14**.** They also explain why this is so. God has already said everything and does not continually repeat Himself. Certainly not in our present dispensation, in which He hides Himself. The sending of prophets would be contrary to this. Nevertheless, in the first generation of Christianity prophets were sent, logically, but afterwards it ceases again. After the Babylonian exile the Lord sent three post-exilic prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) and then it ceased; it remained silent for 400 years. God is silent. The first writings again by prophets were after the resurrection of Christ. Then the New Testament era began. Then the Lord Jesus appears. He is regarded as a New Testament Prophet.
The apostles/prophets (one “category”) laid the foundation upon which the Church is built. Afterwards there came evangelists and shepherds and teachers. Those are two categories: evangelists, and shepherds/teachers. They indeed proclaim the Word of God — one, so to speak, outwardly, and the other inwardly — but nevertheless on the basis of the Word that we have received through the prophets. Someone who discusses, explains or studies the word of the prophets is not thereby a prophet. Prophets are there where the Word is not yet, so that it might be given. And where it is, prophets are not needed. Where the Lord Himself says that the Word of God (the Bible) is complete, and that a curse is pronounced upon anyone who adds to it, it therefore means that there are no more prophets. But in order to still have prophets, people have widened the concept of “prophet”: that it is anyone who speaks the Word of God. But it is not so. That is an evangelist, possibly a teacher or priest, but not a prophet. As long as we take it from a book, we are not prophets, and as long as we do it outside the book, we are accursed. That is somewhat stark, but I find it increasingly necessary to state matters as sharply as the Bible does. “Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel …” — that is the Antichrist, or one of his forerunners. Examples of these are Mohammed and Joseph Smith. There is no other gospel (Galatians 1:6–7). Nothing is to be added to God’s Word. We have everything in a Book. Black and white — and therefore we need no prophets now.

Acts 2:22

22 Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a Man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:
Peter was addressing men of Israel. This explains his choice of words. Whether Jesus of Nazareth was “approved among others besides the men of Israel by miracles and wonders and signs” remains to be seen. He speaks to those present there, just as the apostle Paul at Athens addresses the Athenians specifically and adds certain “local colour”. But that does not mean that the message is not intended for others. Peter is aware that he is addressing men of Israel and that he can appeal to events that took place among them in recent years. In particular even in the past weeks, for that is what this concerns. Moreover, he can appeal to their presumed knowledge of the Scriptures. He does so afterwards, for he refers to writings and to the tomb of David. Peter appeals to the promises that God made to Israel in Old Testament times. But those promises were not exclusively for Israel.
Jesus of Nazareth, a Man of God — or better said: “a Man of God.” That latter term refers to all those other figures in preceding history who are so called. “A Man of God” was a fairly regular title of a prophet: a man of God, a Prophet, with the name Jesus, coming from Nazareth.
That He was a Man of God is not demonstrated in His origin — such as being born of the virgin and conceived by the Holy Spirit — but it is demonstrated in the signs and wonders that He did. That was the customary pattern with the Old Testament men of God, who also performed powers, signs and wonders. They were not born of a virgin or conceived by the Holy Spirit. There is a difference, but not at this point.
Concerning the powers, wonders and signs, it is said in John 20:30: “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book.” John also really describes only very few, compared to the other evangelists. “But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His Name.” The miracles He performed were signs of His divine sending. Not primarily signs that He was the Son of God – that would have to be demonstrated elsewhere. Signs were always given — in the Old Testament also — with the same intent, for they were always signs of the work the Messiah would one day perform. The Lord Jesus also performed those signs. Only He Himself would be the Messiah, and that is what this is now about. That is what Peter will now explain here in Acts 2. For he says: I take it for granted that you know it. “As ye yourselves also know. It was done in the midst of you.” It was demonstrated.

Acts 2:23
“Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,
ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.”
“By the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” are actually two things.
If it is the counsel of God, then it means that God arranged it.
A “counsel” is a judicial decision, or it is “the council” that pronounces the

decision.
That is also called a counsel. The basic meaning is that it is a binding prescribed judgement.
The supreme court in the Netherlands is called de Hoge Raad (the High Council/Court).
One does not go there for non-binding advice, but for a compelling decision that must resolve the problem.
“Determinate counsel” means that this counsel is fixed; “determinate” literally means “bounded”, deriving from boundary markers or posts. The word comes from there.
It is a fixed, limited counsel of God, and therefore has to do with a judicial decision.
I emphasise this, because the risk exists that it will be interpreted as simply “a plan of God”.
But this word is stronger; it is not only His eternal purpose, as for example in Ephesians.
It is His counsel: that is, not merely a plan, but a legal plan. It has to do with legal matters.
There is a lawful basis (the law of the kinsman-redeemer) for the handing over and crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. If one person commits an offence, and another bears the punishment—surely that cannot be? That must be a judicial error?
In this case it is not, because the law, a divine law, established in the Mosaic Law, says—in our own words—that the head of the family has the right to take upon himself the responsibility for the family, or for any member of the family.
He does not have to do so; he may.
An illustration of this is found in the book of Ruth. Ruth, her mother-in-law, and their family had fallen into poverty.
Boaz was the head of the family, the goel (kinsman-redeemer), and therefore he had the right of redemption. Afterwards, as he himself said, that was actually not so simple, for there was someone else who had prior rights.
The Bible speaks of Him as the “Son of Man”, who in that capacity, and therefore as the Goel of humanity, indeed took the right to bring about redemption.
This work of atonement by the Lord Jesus, at the cross of Golgotha, fits within the counsel of God.
It is wholly in accordance with the law—God’s law.
The responsibility for that crucifixion is laid upon the Jewish, the Israelite men.
Israel is not so much held guilty for having rejected and crucified Him, but for not having accepted Him afterwards as their Redeemer; that they did not afterwards heed the preaching.
Therefore here the same people who crucified Him are preached to.
In verse 37 it says: “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?”
And then Peter said, in essence: do not despair—repent, and each of you

be baptised, and thereby your sins will be forgiven, and you will receive the Holy Spirit, and we will speak of it no more.
The Holy Spirit is the risen Christ.
“And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him.” (Matthew 12:32, KJV)
People are condemned, not on the basis of sins they have committed, but on the basis of unbelief.
This applies both to Jews and to Gentiles.

Acts 2:24
“Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.”
“God hath raised Him up.”
I find that such a beautiful statement—so laconic and so self-evident.
Without argument as to whether this could or could not happen.
It is not considered necessary to set it out systematically.
Simply: “God hath raised Him up, having loosed the pains of death.”
And then comes the difficult part: “because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.”
“Of it” is obviously the death.
“To be holden” in the sense of restrained and kept, for that is the old meaning.
“To hold” also means to restrain, to control, to keep.
Here it says that death could not hold Him.
God raised Him up because it was impossible that death could hold Him.
Why could death not hold Him?
I ask the question, because it is usually answered with: because He was God, or because He was the Son of God, or something like that.
But that is not true! Scripture does not say so. It says something else.
Why could death not hold Him?
Because His Father—that is, God in heaven—was stronger than death.
Why did God raise Him up? That question is answered elsewhere, for example in Hebrews and in Romans: that faith is counted for righteousness (Romans 4:3, 5, 9, 22).
“The just shall live by faith.”
Since the Lord Jesus was a Believer—though He bore the sin of the world—He was raised.
Because God, for obvious reasons, had special purposes with Him, He raised Him first from the dead and thereby gave Him the right of the firstborn.
In the Bible it was foretold that He would rise; therefore it was impossible that death should hold Him.
God had said He would rise; it was unthinkable that it would not happen.
It has nothing to do with the power of death, nor with the inherent power of the Lord Jesus.
It has simply to do with the Word of God, which says that He would rise from the dead, and therefore He rises.
It is impossible that it should not be so.

That is the real argument. After all, Psalm 16 is cited:
“For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.
Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” (Psalm 16:10–11)
There it stands: God has said that it will be so. Therefore it will be so.
It is the only true argument.
Do not read here: “He was God, so He rose from the dead,” for then you miss the reality.
Namely that the Lord came to earth in humiliation, laid aside His divine glory, emptied Himself, became a man, took upon Himself the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death. (Philippians 2)
A God who is obedient? To whom would God be obedient?
He “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him.” (Philippians 2)
Nothing by His own power. It was submission, humility, and servanthood.
Afterwards God raised Him from the dead.
It had to happen for the simple reason that it had previously been announced in Scripture.
I find that the most beautiful argument: it could not be otherwise.
Why not? Because God had said it.

Acts 2:25
“For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved.”
We should read the Scripture passage now from the standpoint of the Lord Jesus.
The words of Psalm 16 are considered to be the words of the Lord Jesus Himself—placed as it were in His mouth beforehand, a thousand years earlier.
“I foresaw the Lord always before me” is not literal, but figurative.
He set His expectation upon God: His work, His power, His plan, and upon God’s promises.
Therefore the Lord Jesus is presented to us also as a believer.
He believed in Him whom He called “My heavenly Father”, looking forward to His appointment as Son in the future.
He awaited “the joy that was set before him.” (Hebrews 12:2)
The words of the Lord Jesus are: “He is on my right hand. He is near me; He helps me.”
And so it was. He received power from above—but it was not His own power.
It was the power He received from God.
That did not make Him God, but the Servant of God.

Acts 2:26
“Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope:”
David speaks here of that joy.
“To rest”, as is written on gravestones, is to die, to enter death.

To rest does not mean to recover, but to cease from whatever it was.
That is the biblical meaning.
When a person dies, there is no hope.
While there is life, there is hope.
We always have hope, because we have eternal life.
The Lord Jesus did not have that—depending on one's perspective—but He did have hope, because eternal life had been promised to Him.
He would have the throne of His father David, an unshakeable kingdom.
He must have known those prophecies and promises from 2 Samuel 7.
They concerned Him, whispered to Him as He lived on earth.
God spoke to other prophets—why not to Him? There is nothing improper in that.
"And thus my flesh shall rest in hope."
God spoke about His Son through the mouth of David, who therefore also spoke of his own Son: the Son of God, the Son of David, and so of His resurrection. Hence these words:

Acts 2:27–28
"Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.
Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance."
"My soul"—that is "me", who I am.
A human being is a soul.
Many translations render it "grave", but that is a misunderstanding.
It is indeed more than that. The word in Greek is hades.
In Psalm 16 the Hebrew is Sheol—the realm of the dead.

Acts 2:34–35
34 For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself,
The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,
35 Until I make thy foes thy footstool.
This concerns the Son of David. We saw a similar structure already in verses 30 and 31. There it was about the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus on the basis of Psalm 16. And here it is about Psalm 110 and a statement about what follows: namely, the exaltation of the Lord Jesus, when it was said to Him—as it also says here—"Sit thou on my right hand."
"The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make…", or in order that, because "in order that" and "until" are in those ancient languages very closely connected.
This is said to Him, to the Messiah, the Son of David, who is therefore his Lord: "Sit thou on my right hand, until (or in order that) I make thy foes thy footstool." That is the essence of the preaching.
In the New Testament this is one of the most frequently quoted Old Testament texts. Many consequences are drawn from it. It is taken from Psalm 110:1. In the New Testament much is made of that expression. In the first place because it says that the Son of David is the Lord of David.

In the Gospel of Matthew (chapter 21) it is cited by the Lord Himself. He says there, in effect: “If the Son of David is the Messiah, as you say, why then doth David call Him his Lord in Psalm 110:1?” They fail to answer this question.
Afterwards, in the New Testament generally, the phrase is used to show that the position of the Lord Jesus Christ is not on the throne of David, but on a much higher Throne, in heaven itself, because He is the Image of God (Hebrews 1:3).
We now arrive at the well-known verse 36, the summary of the entire speech. You see that immediately from the word “therefore”: that is, on the basis of what has just been said.

Acts 2:36
“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God **hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.”**
That is the preaching; that is what it is all about. And so Peter says: This Jesus is now made both Lord and Christ. Which in the first place means that He was not that before His resurrection—or at least, He was not that during His life on earth.
He was not then the Christ, and neither was He the Lord in this official sense.
For if He already was, He could never have been made Christ and Lord.
The general problem is that Christians, over time, have always felt compelled to prove, defend, demonstrate, and preach that Jesus is the Christ—and moreover that He is God. The result is that they have forgotten that this was not always so; that Jesus, in His walk on earth, was not yet the Messiah and not yet God in that official, manifested sense.
He came from heaven to earth, became man, and His path led to death.
Hebrews 2:14 says:
“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;”
And in verse 9:
“…that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”
He lived on earth as man. There is nothing difficult about that, because Scripture says so in many other places: not only is the Lord Jesus, during His walk on earth, described as man, but even now He is still called Man—for He still is Man. Since He rose, He is that again. He also was that. He rose from the dead as Man.
God has appointed that Man to judge the whole earth (Acts 17:31):
“Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained;…”
There is only one God, and only one Mediator between God and men:
“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” (1 Timothy 2:5)
There is really nothing difficult about this, but we read over it. We behave as if Scripture said only that He appeared as a man, but in reality was not.

Then someone says: “But does it not say that He already was the Christ at that earlier time?”
I reply: No. What I read is that someone says to Him:
“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16)
And the Lord then says: Yes, that may be so, but keep your mouth shut. Or He says: “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee.” But He does not say: “Indeed, that is already the case.” For the simple reason that He would be the Christ; He still had to become so. It is fine that they recognise and acknowledge Him as such, but He would only be Christ in His resurrection.
He is appointed Christ on the basis of His resurrection. Then He becomes the Son of God in power (Romans 1:4). He is then made Lord and Christ, according to Acts 2:36.
He did not bring anything with Him from “elsewhere” for this purpose. He has had the same life on earth as we have, with all human circumstances included—all human uncertainties, all human instincts, all the human things that can hinder a person, whatever they may be. Emotions too, which can obstruct clear thinking. And that is just as well; for if you had no emotions and yet could think, you would be a kind of computer. You would not truly live.
He had to find His way through all this, just as we do.
Therefore He knows what we need. He knows what it is to be human, to live as a man here on earth (Hebrews 4).
He had to learn obedience. That does not mean that He was disobedient, but that obedience had to be developed. For you can also choose not to be obedient. He had to learn faithfulness.
Scripture says that in those circumstances He learned obedience, and that He, in prayer, cried out to God in heaven—He prayed for deliverance (Hebrews 5). He did not merely pretend to be man. He was Man.
He “ran the race, for the joy that was set before Him” (Hebrews 12:2):
“Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”
He was Prophet. God used Him. He knew things He could not naturally know, but which were given Him from God—that is the essence of the prophets. Things were revealed to them.
He did miracles, signs, and mighty works which God did by Him (Acts 2:22):
“Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:”
“Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself” (Philippians 2). That is, after He had become man—which already was a humiliation—He humbled Himself still further, namely by making Himself a servant. He subjected Himself to the One whom He served, “becoming obedient”. That is a life-path. Hebrews 5:8 says:
“Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;”
Philippians 2:8:

“And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”
And then?
Philippians 2:9:
“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:”
For that reason.
If you do not know, or do not realise, or do not accept the humiliation of the Lord, then you do not know His exaltation either. Then it means nothing in practice. In fact, by denying that humiliation—or to the extent that one denies it—one also denies His exaltation. If He always already was what He is now, then the whole story falls apart. What was He doing here on earth, then? What sense did it all have? How so “highly exalted”? He was then already always in that position, was He not?
No, says the Bible. He was, for a short time—or “a little”—made lower than the angels. And cheerfully that is then “translated” in some versions as “made almost divine”. But that is not what it says in the KJV. Psalm 8, quoted in Hebrews 2, says:
“Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour.” (Psalm 8:5; compare Hebrews 2:7)
He was not “made almost divine”, but made lower than the angels, humbled beneath the angels. And therefore Hebrews 1 says that He now has a position above the angels. Hebrews 2: after He for a little while was made lower than the angels—that is what Psalm 8 says.
That exaltation only has meaning because of that humiliation.
For us it is the same. Our humiliation, our servanthood, our obedience to the Lord, has no real function if it would not lead to our exaltation in the future. In that sense we follow the example of the Lord Jesus and run our race behind Him (among others, Hebrews 12).
Philippians 2:9
“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:”
Which Name is above every name? That is simply the Name “Jehovah”; for that is stated many times in the Old Testament.
“I am the LORD (Jehovah), and beside me there is no God.” (Isaiah 45:5)
Moreover, Jehovah says in the Old Testament, already in Isaiah:
“I am the Alpha and the Omega”… No, it does not say that, for that is Greek. But it does say:
“I am the first, and I am the last;” (Isaiah 44:6)
The New Testament equivalent comes from the mouth of the Lord Jesus, who says:
“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord…” (Revelation 1:8)
These words are taken directly from Isaiah. In Isaiah they refer to Jehovah, and in Revelation to the Lord Jesus. Both cannot be independently true in a separate way, for “beside me there is no God” (Isaiah 45:5). There can only be one First, and also only one Last. Therefore: Jesus is Jehovah. Jesus has received that Name.

For the Name Jehovah is not so much the private Name of a Person, but the Name given to the revelation of the invisible Being of God. Since the Lord Jesus Christ, from His resurrection onwards, is “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1), He therefore bears the Name Jehovah. Where in the Old Testament an Angel appeared as the revelation, the outward manifestation of the Being of God, He is asked: “What is thy name?” And the answer often comes hesitantly or somewhat cryptically, but still: “I AM THAT I AM”, or simply: “I AM” — Jahweh, Jehovah.
That Name is now borne by Jesus of Nazareth, because God now reveals Himself only in Him. So when the invisible God becomes visible, takes form, or however you wish to express it, the Man Jesus of Nazareth appears. For He is the Image of God and therefore God.
Thus the Epistle to the Colossians says:
“Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:” (Colossians 1:15)
And in 2:9:
“For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”
How it “works”? We do not need to know that. We only need to accept that it is so. Knowing how it works is, in most cases, not granted to us and also not necessary. Would you really want to know, to understand in detail, how your computer works? You do not need to. Others can figure that out. You only need to know how to operate the thing, what you can do with it. So too with Scripture.
Whether it is true or not does not depend on our understanding of how it works. The Bible teaches at any rate that God has highly exalted Him—the Lord Jesus—and given Him a Name above every name, at His resurrection. To what end?
Paul puts it like this:
Philippians 2:10–11
10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;
11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
This is taken from:
Isaiah 45:21–23
21 Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me.
22 Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.
23 I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.
In the Old Testament it is: “I am the LORD (Jehovah); and there is none else. There is no God besides me.” “Unto me every knee shall bow.” In the New Testament it is: “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow…” and “that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

The Name above every name is Jehovah, and that Name has been given to the risen Lord Jesus.
He may perhaps already have been “Lord” before His incarnation; but then you ask again: “How does that work?” And I answer: I do not know either.
I only know that He descended out of heaven, and that He would also ascend again into heaven. In the Old Testament He bore the Name Jehovah, but not the Name Jesus, for He was not yet Man, and likewise not the Name Christ, for Christ would be the Son of David.
In His resurrection He is first “Jesus”—for that is what He became at His birth. He then became the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One, who received eternal life. He was furthermore appointed—or made—Lord and Christ. Thus also as High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, Mediator of the New Covenant, Head of the new humanity (Romans 5).
We are now reaching the end of the sermon of the apostle Peter in Acts 2. The essence of the preaching is that God “hath made that same Jesus… both Lord and Christ. This Jesus whom ye have crucified.” That is in fact the content of the entire biblical message: that this Jesus, the Man of Nazareth, is appointed Lord and Christ, and thus has become Man in God’s image and likeness. For that is also the fulfilment of those statements from the opening chapters of Genesis.
He has become “the author of eternal salvation” (Hebrews 5:9), and that is what it comes down to in practice—and that is also what the apostle Peter says in the following verses.

Acts 2:37–39
37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?
38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.
39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call.
The address of the apostle Peter made a deep impression. It says: “when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart.” They had nothing more to say in reply. Imagine it being said to you: “That same Jesus whom ye have crucified, God hath made both Lord and Christ.” Then you have done everything wrong that one could possibly do wrong. That is what is expressed in that simple statement.
They were pricked in their heart. But they said to Peter and the other apostles: “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”
What can we still do?
The answer is: actually, nothing. For it is not a matter of doing, but of faith—from the heart.
Peter says: “Repent.”
This word “repent” indicates a changed mindset and attitude. A change in a person’s thinking. The essence is of course that one repents unto the Lord. That is not explicitly added here, but it is more or less the standard

phrase also among the prophets: repent unto the LORD. That can only be a turning of the heart. A conversion of the inner man, so that one finally, at last, would be willing to listen to the Lord.
Therefore repentance is synonymous with coming to faith—or simply "believing", for the word "believe" is also used in the sense of "coming to faith". Repentance means nothing if it is only a change in one's outward conduct. If it is not in the heart, it is nothing.
Peter is in fact telling his contemporaries that they should humble themselves. He says that later in his epistle:
"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:" (1 Peter 5:6)
They should be humble—that is a matter of a change of attitude.
That is repentance: submission to the Lord, to His Word.
What consequence does that repentance then have?
Well, that is stated afterwards: "for the remission of sins." When one repents, one will receive forgiveness of sins, and in addition also the Holy Spirit—in one go, as a single whole.
Peter had spoken about "the gift of the Holy Ghost" in the preceding verses, at least in verse 33. That was the occasion for this sermon.
What we read is: "Repent… for the remission of sins"—and now I am omitting this parenthetical clause for a moment: "and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ…".
That clause is popular in certain circles—perhaps, I think, out of motives of "customer retention". Then there are those who read something like this: "Repent, and afterwards let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ unto the forgiveness of sins." But that is to read it wrongly.
There is a very simple argument for that: if it were so, there would be quite a number of Scriptures which then only tell a half-truth—and a half-truth is a whole lie. For example, a Scripture that says: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). For if it were also necessary to be baptized, then that statement would be only half true.
The official Baptist doctrine says: no, faith alone is not enough; you must indeed be baptized. That is in their own doctrinal books. "You must be baptized, otherwise you will not be saved."
And attached to that is the fact that, if you let them baptise you, you also become a member of their church. That has the appearance of customer-binding.
I believe that baptism is very important. Otherwise I would never be willing to baptise anyone. I do not feel particularly "called" to do so: I say with Paul, "Christ sent me not to baptize" (1 Corinthians 1:17).
But if someone asks me to baptise him, then I must indeed do it—that I consider important. The normal course of things is that, when someone comes to faith, he is baptised. And, if possible, at the same time—not in order to receive forgiveness of sins, or to go to heaven, or to be born again. For that, one would simply believe.
This is actually an exceptional text, in which it is said in one breath: "Repent, and be baptized." There is more attached to it, and that is a linguistic matter.

“Repent ye” is plural. It is said to the group as a whole. You cannot see that in English, but in Greek you can. And “ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” is also plural. That “ye” is plural in Greek. It is said to the collective, to the group.
But this middle phrase: “and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ” is not addressed in a plural form, but to individuals. The construction of the sentence is different. That makes that one clause —“every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ”—a parenthetical remark which is complete in itself, but which, because of its form, does not connect directly with “Repent ye”.
It does not say: “Let each one of you repent and be baptized…”
It is: “Repent ye” (to the group), and then: “and let every one of you, one by one, be baptized…” (individual responsibility). And then the main sentence continues, again in the general plural: “for the remission of sins… and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”
If you read: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you for the remission of sins,” then you read that one must believe and be baptized before receiving forgiveness of sins. That conflicts with what we read elsewhere, and is therefore incorrect.
What it says is: come to faith, repent—and each one is furthermore called, personally, to be baptized. Is that necessary in order to receive forgiveness of sins? In order to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit? No. In any case, it does not follow from this verse. And if it does not follow from this verse, I do not know from which verse it would.
If you then say: “So I do not need to be baptized,” you have misunderstood.
If you wish to serve the Lord in your life, you will also have to take that step once you have understood that it is expected of a believer.
You do not read in the Bible that people are commanded to be baptized in the form of a law. What you do see is that believers have themselves baptized. That is normal. We do not know whether all did so, but we do know that it is the norm—not just since this day, but already before, for clarity’s sake.
There are some who have invented that baptism is no longer for us; that it applied to that first church, but that this is a totally different church than the Church of today. In the Bible such a transition, where baptism or the Lord’s Supper are abolished, is nowhere to be found. You cannot justify that biblically in any way. No, I know how they reason and what their doctrines are, but it does not hold.
I think it is a doctrine designed to evade a certain responsibility.
What matters is that the Word of God should be preached, and where people come to faith, it should, if all is well, lead to baptism by immersion, for the word “baptism” means “immersion”. And in reality the word baptizō, translated as “baptise”, even means “to drench, to saturate”.
It is more than merely dipping. It is also the saturating of that object with that liquid.
In 1 Corinthians 12 the baptism is explained as a type, though there are other Scriptures that explain why one should be baptized and what baptism represents: namely death and resurrection.

The complete outworking of it—what it represents as a whole and why it is necessary—we find in 1 Corinthians 12:13:
“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”
Note: this is not about baptism in water, but about baptism with/in/by/through the Spirit. Baptism in water is the picture of that, and that is why the “baptism in the Spirit” is also called “baptism”. Literally you cannot be immersed in the Spirit. It is figurative language. Spirit cannot be poured out or poured over in a literal liquid sense, for Spirit is not a fluid. But where liquids are types of the Spirit, this imagery is used: “I will pour out my Spirit.”
So it is with baptism as well. Baptism with/in/by the Spirit is evidently derived from baptism in water.
“We have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” We are all drenched with that one Spirit. For baptism is saturation.
The Greek word for “to dip” or “to dye” is baptō. That is not sprinkling. It does not even resemble sprinkling. In the Old Testament it says that Aaron “dipped his right finger in the blood, and sprinkled it…”—there you have the meaning of the terms. He dipped his finger in the blood and he sprinkled. What was sprinkled was not baptized. The finger was baptized (dipped), but the finger was not sprinkled.
Why should one be baptized? The answer is quite simple: because baptism expresses the work that the Lord does in a believer. And that is a work that man cannot do himself. He allows it to be done by the Lord. In the same way he has himself baptized.
He is reckoned to be dead, buried, and raised with Christ. That is what baptism portrays. There is one word for that: new birth, or regeneration.
The Lord Jesus used the term “baptism” in announcing His own suffering and resurrection. He spoke of a “baptism” with which He must be baptized (Matthew 20:22–23). He was speaking of His suffering and therefore also of His resurrection. Baptism in water is the portrayal of this.
There is yet another reason why we should be baptized, according to Luke 7. Verse 29 says:
“And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John.”
According to verse 30 the Pharisees did not:
“But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.”
The thought is: one justifies God by being baptized, and one rejects the counsel of God by not being baptized. To “justify” means that one accepts God’s counsel. One does that by being baptized.
The counsel of God is the judgement of the supreme Judge, who condemns the sinner to death. And what does baptism represent? Death—and then resurrection, on the basis of faith. If one rejects baptism, one thereby rejects the counsel of God against oneself. That is what it says here.
We are baptized, and thereby we acknowledge God’s verdicts over our lives: that we are good for nothing and must become a new creation in

Christ. That we want to become that, that we submit ourselves to that—and therefore we are baptized.
Verse 38: the expression “to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” has nothing to do with what is called a “baptismal formula”, which comes from church “forms” used to regulate matters according to human prescriptions. In the Bible there is no fixed baptismal formula at all. We do not read anywhere what someone should say when he baptizes another. I myself usually say something, but that is not necessary. Baptism is always in the Name of the Lord Jesus. I do not do it in my own name. To make that clear, I add: “in the Name of the Lord Jesus”—for who am I? That is exactly what John the Baptist said when the Lord came to him to be baptized:
“But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?” (Matthew 3:14)
If someone baptizes, he always does so in the Name of Jesus Christ.
Verse 39: “For the promise is unto you” is “the promise of the Holy Ghost” from verse 33—what had been promised; it is the “gift of the Holy Ghost” from the preceding verse. Promise is the promise of eternal life: that everyone who believes should become a child of God and also be called so, as we know from John 1:12 and 1 John 3:1:
“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:” (John 1:12)
“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God:” (1 John 3:1)
It is about the promise of a New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31):
“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:”
God made the promises to the fathers, and has fulfilled those promises to us, their children, in that He raised up Jesus from the dead (compare Acts 13:32–33). For the resurrection of Christ is the fulfilment of the promises of God.
Not only for those who were present here, but also for all those “that are afar off”.
Afar off from what? Afar off from Jerusalem? Yes, but more specifically: afar off from “the commonwealth of Israel” (compare Ephesians 2). It is not only intended for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles in general. More specifically again: not only for Jews who were Israelites, but also for those who by then were no longer Israelites at all—who had become alienated from the commonwealth of Israel. That concerns the ten tribes.

Acts 2:40
“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.”
What generation? The Jewish one, of course. He is speaking to Israelite men.
By being baptised, by coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, one is taken out of Judaism. Jews came to faith in the Lord Jesus; after that they no longer presented themselves as Jews, but as Christians. They were “saved from this untoward generation”.

When one comes to faith, one does not enter Judaism, nor some "converted Judaism". On the contrary. In the Church there is "neither Jew nor Greek" (Romans 10:12; Galatians 3:28).
The Church consists of people who are born again. They receive a new origin. Insofar as they were Jews, they are no longer that in a primary, fundamental sense. Insofar as we were Gentiles, we are that now also no longer. Neither Jew nor Gentile, neither Greek nor whatever else. We are one in Christ. We are Christians.
When one comes to faith, one is taken out. One does not join that old system. It is called the Church (Assembly), and not something else.

Acts 2:41
"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."
In these closing verses of the chapter we are no longer strictly on that same day of Pentecost itself; the point is that what is written here concerns those who came to faith.
"Three thousand souls." The word "soul" elsewhere in the Bible has, in the first instance, to do with the person in practical, lived reality—closely bound up with spirit when it comes to faith and new birth. It is also connected with receiving the Spirit, being born of the Spirit—these are the expressions.
Nevertheless, it says: "there were added unto them about three thousand souls".
" Soul" is the designation of a person's practical life, their daily walk. To be added to the Church means nothing if it has no consequences for everyday life.
But they did not first have to demonstrate their faith in their practical life, or follow a course, or be "examined" and tested. That would have been impossible. They were simply baptised on the basis of their faith.
Whether all of it happened literally on one day, I doubt it—that is a great deal. But in any case: whoever gladly received the word was baptised.
Who did the adding? You can also ask: who were added? Three thousand souls. Then you know at once that the other question—who added them? —must be answered differently: the Lord, of course. The Lord adds believers to the Church. The Lord gives believers eternal life.
I can put it shorter still: when one comes to faith, one receives the Holy Spirit, for that is the teaching here. We are all baptised by one Spirit into one Body (1 Corinthians 12:13). We receive that Spirit, that Life. We all receive that same Life, and therefore together we form one Body. That is what the Spirit does. It is already about that Body here in Acts 2, actually already in Acts 1, where it is announced that this would happen.

Acts 2:42
"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."
"Those who gladly received his word were baptized"; they were added to the Church not because they were baptised, but because they gladly received the word. "Receiving" is another word for believing:

“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:” (John 1:12)
To receive is to accept. One must be a believer in order to be baptised. There are no more conditions than that—except, of course, that water must be available. As with the Ethiopian eunuch:
“…See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?
And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.” (Acts 8:36–37, KJV text including verse 37)
And then he was baptised. Nothing else was required.
“They continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine…” These apostles were not “ministers”, professional theologians, academics, nor a pope. And then:
“…and in fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”
What has been made of these words over time! Something solemn, sacramental—communion, eucharist. The more difficult the term, the more “sacred” it becomes. But in the Bible it is simply called “breaking of bread”. They did that together. There was nothing ceremonially complicated about it.
“And in prayers.” Which prayers? Not set forms printed at the back of a Bible. They had none of that. They had to compose and utter their own prayers—from the heart, inspired by the Scriptures. It really is that simple, and it worked.
“Stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” is what we too should be.
“Stedfastly” means it is hard; it is not self-evident. It brings difficulties and opposition with it. There is resistance to the apostles’ doctrine. To persevere in the doctrine is the first thing believers need—not only at the beginning. It is a basic necessity of life in practice.
The biblical teaching, the teaching of the apostles, the sound doctrine—this term is clear enough. It keeps a person healthy spiritually and makes him grow.
In the “apostles’ doctrine” it is not so much about the apostles themselves, but about the teaching. They did not remain steadfastly with the apostles as men, but in what they taught.
The apostles laid the foundation of the Church already in the first generation of Christianity. That is why we do not have apostles in our day. Once the foundation is laid, it does not need to be laid again. The “house of God” to which we are added is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Ephesians 2:20).
The apostles were also prophets. They were needed for the foundation, because Church truth—hidden in the Old Testament—had to be revealed and demonstrated. That is exactly what the apostles, as prophets, did, as is evident from their writings, which we possess since.
At that time the New Testament books had not yet been written. So there was no alternative: the work had to be done through prophets appointed by God. They are called apostles; together: “apostles and [that is, namely] prophets”.
Paul writes in the closing verses of Romans 16 that these things have been made known “by the scriptures of the prophets” (Romans 16:26). It

is the basis of Church truth—the whole New Testament, including the Gospels, which were written only after the resurrection, when our Church dispensation had already long begun. That is why we should continue in “the apostles’ doctrine”.
“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;
God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?” (Hebrews 2:3–4)
This great salvation began to be spoken by the Lord Himself, and afterwards was confirmed to us by the apostles, by those who heard Him and were taught by Him. This was shown by the fact that it was accompanied by signs and wonders and manifold powers, with which this preaching was divinely authorised.
Verse 42: they were steadfast in the apostles’ doctrine. Whoever wants to lead us away from that is teaching something unhealthy and not the Word of God. Therefore it costs effort to remain with it; for the apostles’ doctrine is constantly attacked. Where they were steadfast in the apostles’ doctrine, they were also steadfast in fellowship. We persevere in that one doctrine—that binds us together. In that fellowship we ought not to know one another “after the flesh”, but after the Spirit, in Christ, as new creations. In practice that happens via the Word: by continuing in the apostles’ doctrine and staying with the sound words of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what the apostles’ doctrine is about.

“Breaking of bread” and the cup
Verse 42: “…and in breaking of bread…”
“The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16b)
The answer is obviously: yes. So what does it mean that “they continued stedfastly in… the breaking of bread”? Exactly the same as the two previous things. The bread which we break is communion with Christ, and that is the Church, the Body of Christ.
In the literal, practical sense it is “the Lord’s supper”, as the Lord broke the bread and distributed it in the night in which He was betrayed (1 Corinthians 11:23–25):
“And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you [KJV margin: given for you]: this do in remembrance of me.
After the same manner also he took the cup…”
“Do this in remembrance of me, till I come.” That is what they did, and often, for it says: they continued in it. That will have been more than once a year. How often? I have no idea.
Someone will say: “Yes, but we read that they did it on the first day of the week.” True, we read that they were accustomed to come together on the first day of the week. From this is sometimes assumed that they broke bread every first day of the week. But that is not stated anywhere; you cannot actually find that in Scripture. I myself was taught that that was

the only truly New Testament way: that those who meet every Sunday and celebrate the Lord's Supper then, are the only ones really "doing it right". Until my father said to me: "There is hardly a Bible text for that."
We have made a ritual out of it. If I set the institutions aside for a moment and simply read the Bible regarding "breaking of bread", I see that there is nothing "mystical" about breaking bread. We know why it was broken: to distribute it and so that all might have part in the one bread (1 Corinthians 10:17):
"For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread."
We do not partake of a divided bread, not of separate breads, but of one bread. For as much as it is broken, it is in order to give everyone a share. The phrase "which is broken for you" in English traditions is textually doubtful; the important point is: "This is my body which is for you." The breaking in itself has no symbolic meaning; its practical meaning is that one bread is shared, so that all partake of that one bread. There lies the symbolic meaning. Likewise with the wine which is poured out.
"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16a)
Wine is poured out so that each may receive a portion. In some countries everyone has his own little cup, into which the wine is poured. The point is that the wine comes from one and the same source; it is communion with the blood, that is, the life—le chaim—of Christ.
The "breaking of bread" appears again in verse 46. There are three expressions of fellowship here. When we continue in the apostles' doctrine, we find one another in that, and that is fellowship. The breaking of bread is in any case not primarily a portrayal of the death of the Lord Jesus; this meal, in which we eat and drink of the same, expresses that we share in the same Body—that one Body, however different we may be. Those Corinthians were expected to know this, and to live accordingly—for that is what it is really about. Not about the ritual of the Lord's Supper, but about the practical meaning. What we are reminded of at the Lord's Supper is our unity. Almost everything else in this life, even in the Christian life, reminds us of differences and sometimes even of divisions; but the Lord's Supper is the expression of the unity we have in Christ.

Acts 2:43
"And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles."
If you respect the context, you come to this conclusion: that this "fear" came upon all those who had come to faith and were added. "Fear" is not the same as panic or cringing terror. Panic is unreasoned fear—fear of the unknown. Fear in the biblical sense is very close to reverence: you have fear of what you know is greater.
An electrician has no mindless fear of electricity, but he does have a healthy fear of it. Fear means that you take account of a reality. You know what you can and cannot do, you know the consequences, and therefore you act accordingly. You have respect. You know what is stronger than you are, and you know how far you may go—you do not cross the boundary.

That is about what “fear of God” is. We are to “fear God” (1 Peter 2:17). That does not mean that we must have paralysing dread of God, but that we know Him, acknowledge Him, respect Him, have reverence for Him, and indeed take Him into account—drawing the consequences.
The sentence “and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles” is perhaps also the immediate occasion for that “fear” that came upon every soul. Whether all of this took place on that same day seems unlikely to me. The “continuing stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” and “in breaking of bread” are statements about the period that followed. But in any case: there was at work a power stronger than man himself; they would take that into account.
The wonders and signs: we should not make them into more than Scripture says they are. We know the wonders and signs done by the Lord Jesus. Now they are done by the apostles—it is the continuation of what the Lord Jesus Himself did. They have the same function.
The function of the signs and wonders is not primarily to improve public health or something of the kind. Their purpose is that the wonders should be signs. Wonders are specific events that stand out, that draw attention. Their function lies in their prophetic or symbolic meaning. The practical benefit to the person healed is not the main point, though it is there. They are called signs. Not every sign is a wonder, but every wonder here is a sign.
Of what are they signs? What do they portray? They are, without exception, portrayals of the work that would be accomplished—and has been accomplished—by the Lord Jesus Christ in His resurrection.
The signs in the Old Testament likewise are portrayals of the present work of Christ. When in the Old Testament the present work of Christ is foretold, it is not His actual inward work that is set out, but His signs and wonders are described: opening the eyes of the blind, the ears of the deaf, causing the lame and crippled to stand and walk, opening the prisons, and so forth. These things are mentioned in that way (for instance in Isaiah 35). But what He would truly do, inwardly and spiritually, is not detailed there; He would indeed do such things, but figuratively. That is what He does in our present time. The wonders of the Lord Jesus, and of the apostles, are a picture of that.
Insofar as they had a practical benefit, it was as Nicodemus said: “…no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.” (John 3:2)
Therefore these apostles must be prophets sent by God. If that is so, then it follows that their word, their teaching, is the Word of God. Even where you cannot directly test their teaching in every detail, it is confirmed by signs and wonders.
So we read:
Hebrews 2:3–4
3 How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;
4 God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?

And these famous words in:
John 20:30–31
30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:
31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.
This is, of course, written after His resurrection. Since then He is the Christ in the full, official sense. The wonders that the Lord Jesus did were at any rate confirmations of His divine sending.

Transition to Acts 3
In my Bible the heading above Acts 3 reads: “The healing of the lame man.” The longer narrative, which continues in chapter 4 because it has far-reaching consequences, indeed begins with the healing of a lame man —that is, with a wonder or sign. We read about it in verse 1:

Acts 3:1
“Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.”
That is three o’clock in the afternoon by our way of reckoning.
In biblical thinking the day begins in the morning at sunrise. The day “brings things to light”. Only the sabbath is the exception, including the great Day of Atonement, which is to be a sabbath; and there are no other sabbaths. The sabbath and the Day of Atonement begin at sunset.
In the future, when the Kingdom of Christ on earth begins, it will appear that this Kingdom for Israel begins at a moment when, for the world, the sun is setting. The great tribulation for the world will then still have to begin. Israel will have had a short tribulation of three and a half years; the tribulation over the world begins three and a half years later and lasts thirty-three years.
The temple is the sanctuary of Israel. It was the way to gather large crowds, evidently, for the whole multitude follows Peter and John and this lame man.
Peter and John together are a picture of the whole house of Israel: Peter as a picture of the two tribes—Judah and Benjamin, “the Jews”; John, in the background, who often appears but seldom speaks, and sometimes is present without even being named, is a picture of the believers from the ten tribes of Israel. That is one reason why his name is only mentioned when it is necessary—but when it is mentioned, it is important.
Thus they arrive at this long discourse of the apostle Peter, which ends with Peter and John being arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin, the High Council—the supreme court within Judaism. And that is exactly where they needed to come. These chapters, including this speech in Acts 3, directly concern the people as a nation. It is not just a sermon to whoever happens to be listening so that individuals may come to faith, but a direct call addressed to the Jewish nation. Hence the Sanhedrin’s role in chapter 4. In reality the subject is the New Covenant and its accompanying blessings, in which we have already come to share and in which Israel, as a nation, will also share. That is the theme of chapters 3 and 4.

Acts 3:2
“And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;”
The healing of this lame man is a portrayal of the eventual healing of Israel as a nation. The wonders are signs, with an indirect, prophetic or typological meaning—not, in the first place, for the sake of the individuals involved, but for the sake of the work of God.
In John 9 it is about the man “which was blind from his birth”. What is wrong with the mother’s womb, we might ask? It is typology: something is fundamentally wrong with the origin of man. The “mother” is this old world, and more specifically “mother earth”—adamah, from which Adam was formed. There is something fundamentally wrong with the origin. That applies also to Israel.
In that blind man the works of God were to be demonstrated; the works of God should be made manifest in him. Man is inclined to blame God for his own defects: if God is the Creator and we are no good, then He must have done something wrong. But the Lord Himself says it is so “that the works of God should be made manifest in him” (John 9:3)—in mankind generally, and in you personally.
To Paul it was said:
“…My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)
That is why man is weak, sick, and defective; why he lacks much: so that the works of God may be revealed in him.
If you had to summarise man’s defect, it is this: he is deaf—he does not want to listen. Man is blind—he does not want to see. Man is lame—impotent, to use a strong word. The core meaning is: “unable to stand”. Man does not have life in himself in a lasting way. He is lame, cannot stand, cannot walk, cannot move—he is, in principle, already dead. That is the reality.
This man, then, as is clear from the circumstances and from Peter’s sermon that follows here, as well as from chapter 4, is a picture of Israel as such—Israel which will one day be healed according to the prophecies of the Old Testament (for example Isaiah 35). Israel will be made alive through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in a future dispensation, at the return of Christ. What the Lord Jesus did in signs was nothing other than to bring these prophecies into their minds.
Verse 2: “…at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple.”
Symbolically, this is about passing through the gate from the court of the Gentiles into the inner court of Israel. The translation “Beautiful” is correct, but the thought is: the right gate. The word translated “Beautiful” is hōraios: “of the right time”, “timely”, and by extension “suitable, fitting”—the proper gate, the right opportunity.
The biblical idea here is that one day Israel, as a complete nation, will go through that gate—in the sense of coming to faith, to repentance, and breaking forth into rejoicing, into praise and honour to God, according to

what the Psalms so explicitly prophesy. One day Israel will enter that Temple—still speaking symbolically—and take up its place as a priestly people, fulfilling the ministry for which it was originally called. This is the right place and the right occasion.
At that gate sat a man who “asked alms”. He was laid there daily at the door of the temple which is called Beautiful. In verse 10 it is again called “the Beautiful gate”. It is repeated so we will not miss it.
“They laid him daily.” Why is that detail emphasised? It could simply have said, “they had laid him there”. Of course he had not come there by himself; someone had put him there. That beggar had his regular spot. He had been sitting there for years—even in the years when the Lord Himself walked there. But only now does something happen.
(And with that the narrative of the sign and the new sermon of Peter continues.)

Acts 3 : 3–7
3 Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.
4 And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.
5 And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.
6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.
7 And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.
Scripture does not say that he saw Peter and John first.
It says Peter and John saw him.
In Greek the emphasis is explicit: Peter and John, as they were about to enter the temple, saw him. They looked at him, and he looked at them.
Then comes the command: “Look on us.” The man fixed his eyes on them, expecting to receive something.
Peter essentially said: I have bad news and good news.
The bad news: no silver or gold.
The good news: what I do have, I give you — in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth: rise up and walk.
Notice that the apostolic miracles are presented without theatrics.
Only once does the Lord employ outward symbolism: when He spits on the ground, mixes the earth, and anoints the blind man’s eyes (John 9). That action is symbolic.
Ordinarily it is a simple authoritative word:
“Rise up and walk.”
“Lazarus, come forth.” (John 11:43)
“Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.” (Mark 5:41)
“Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole.” (Mark 10:52)
The word “rise” is, in essence, the Gospel.
People do the impossible because the Lord gives life.
You know you cannot rise — but you rise, and find that with Him, you can.
Here too: “In the Name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene.”
This is the same expression as in Acts 2:22:
“Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders.”

“Nazarene” functions like a family or geographical name.
Many bore the name Jesus (Joshua). The identifier is: Jesus the Nazarene.
In Scripture this connects not only to Nazareth as a town, but typologically to the Nazirite idea — the vowed one, as illustrated in Samson. Samson is a type of Christ: consecrated, separated to God.
Then: “And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up.”
Immediately his feet and ankles were strengthened — limp limbs became firm.
No gradual rehabilitation, but instantaneous restoration.
Not merely walking, but leaping.
This is a direct fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy:
Isaiah 35:3–7
Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.
Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not:
behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you.
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.
Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing:
for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.
And the parched ground shall become a pool… etc.

Acts 3:8–9
8 And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.
9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God.
This is, in a figurative sense, what may be expected of Israel. The nation is intended to have a place in the temple as a priestly people. That is why you see something similar with the man born blind: when the Lord later finds him, it is in the temple. Where else? That is where he belongs.
Here that thought is applied to this lame man: walking, leaping and praising God – a picture of what Israel will do when it is restored.

Acts 3:10–11
10 And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.
11 And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon’s, greatly wondering.
“Amazement” here means they were “put out of joint”, shaken. When something is “out of joint” it is “dislocated” – ontzet – the same idea. It is like a door that has come off its hinges. People can be like that too: they no longer know how to place what has happened.
Again we are being directed to see this as a picture of the position of Israel as a nation. Solomon’s porch is the southern section of the temple complex, associated with the name of Solomon. According to Josephus, a part of Solomon’s original temple remained standing – a colonnade on the

southern edge of the temple platform. Whether you count it as part of the later temple or not is another question, but the point is: it was still seen as a remnant of the original temple. Not the Wailing Wall – that was never the temple itself – but this porch was linked to Solomon.
Solomon points back to the royal house of David, the origin of the temple, and to the son of David, Solomon, who is a type of Christ and a picture of the Messianic kingdom, the Kingdom of the Son of David. That is what will dawn when Israel, in the future, comes to repentance and the true Son of David appears. That is what the term “Solomon’s porch” is hinting at here.

Acts 3:12
12 And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?
Peter now gives an explanation of what has happened and what it is meant to lead to. It should be clear that this whole speech is about the eventual conversion of Israel.

Acts 3:13
13 The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.
The wording is: “The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers.” God is linked here with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That is the usual formula. In the Old Testament God calls Himself “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”.
Notice that God’s connection with Israel is not based on the Law; otherwise it would have said “the God of Moses”. Instead it is “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob”, because the issue here is the promises God made to these three. He confirmed those promises to them, entirely apart from the Law. Those promises were to be fulfilled in the seed of Abraham, “which is Christ” (cf. Galatians 3).
“His Son” could also be translated “His Servant”, because the underlying word covers both senses: a servant, a young man, a (male) child. Galatians 4 says that as long as the heir is a child, he differs nothing from a servant. The same word can mean “lad” and “servant” – in many languages that’s so. In English: “the boy” – that may be an 80-year-old man, the butler. In French: garçon – a boy, or the waiter.
So “Servant” actually fits the context better here, because it points directly back to Isaiah from chapter 42 onward: the “Servant of the LORD”. “Thou art my servant, in whom I will be glorified” and “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth.” In the New Testament that wording is slightly altered to “Thou art my beloved Son” or “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22; Matthew 3:17). It is the same Person: the Servant or the Son.
This Servant (or Son) Jesus has been glorified only through His resurrection. “The God of our fathers hath glorified his Servant Jesus; whom ye” – when He was not yet glorified – “delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate.”

Acts 3:14–15
14 But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;
15 And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.
You might ask why the phrase in verse 14 is included: “and desired a murderer to be granted unto you” – it seems at first glance to drop in out of nowhere. That murderer is Barabbas, whose name means “son of the father”. He is a picture of the Ten Tribes of Israel. He was in prison – in captivity – but was released.
This isn’t the place to unfold the whole picture, but in brief: whom do you want – this Jesus, or the other one? They crucified the Lord Jesus, and the “other” was set free. Thus salvation went out to the nations. But he too rightly bears the title “son of the father”. Name a “son of the father” alongside Judah and you come to Joseph or Ephraim – the Ten Tribes.
In the period in which the Jewish people are in unbelief, salvation has gone to that “other”, although he is a “murderer”.
“The Prince of life” cannot be killed – unless He first dies and then becomes the Prince of life. And that is exactly what happened. The Prince of life is the One who has life in Himself. But if He has eternal life in Himself, He cannot be destroyed. The word translated here as “Prince” appears in Hebrews 2 as “captain”: “the captain of their salvation” (Hebrews 2:10), and in Hebrews 12 as “the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). In both cases it translates a single Greek word, archēgos – literally “the one who goes in front”, the leader, the first.
“Prince of life” therefore means: the First to receive this eternal life, through resurrection from the dead. He is “the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20). The “captain” in Hebrews is the same as the “Prince” here in Acts 3. The word is used again in Acts 5:31.

Acts 3:16
16 And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.
Notice that the cause of his healing is stated to be faith. Wherever the sick were healed miraculously by the Lord Jesus, it was on the basis of faith. Scripture says: “And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Matthew 13:58). Very simply: there were no believers. God’s blessings are for believers. Scripture does not say that such signs will be done for all who believe, but that, insofar as they are done, they are done for believers. Not everyone is treated identically. That we, as children of God, are all members of His Body is the same for all; but within that one Body we are different members.
This man was a believer. The thought is: when Israel comes to faith, Israel will itself become the “object” of just such a miracle. God will heal Israel, give it life, when the nation as such comes to faith.
“This man” is the lame man. He believed “in his name”, and as a result “his name” has strengthened him and given him life. “His name” is He

Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. But the phrase “His name” carries more than just “that is who He is”. It includes His reputation, everything that is known of Him, His whole history, everything that belongs to Him. That is someone’s “name”: not just the label on a register, but the whole person – his life story, biography, “CV”.
So it is not just “someone called Jesus” who has been raised from the dead; it is the One who was announced in the Old Testament, “who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:20), of whom all the prophets spoke, to whom all the typology of Scripture points. The Son who was to come. That is “His name”, including what we now know of Him as the Firstborn, the Firstfruits, the Heir, the Author of the new creation, of the new humanity – in short: Christ as the source of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him (cf. Hebrews 5:9).
“The faith which is by him” is an expression that can be taken in several ways. The most basic is this: in Scripture, the Lord Jesus is presented as the Believer par excellence, and, insofar as there is such a thing as salvation, it springs from the faith of Jesus Christ. It stems from the fact that He believed. You can still clearly see this in English only in the King James Version, where the phrase “faith of Jesus Christ” occurs (for example, in Romans 3, Galatians 2–3). Modern translations usually change it to “faith in Jesus Christ”, but “faith of” is grammatically and theologically correct.
Synonymous expressions are used too: His obedience, His faithfulness, and so on. Faith is trust in what has been communicated. If nothing has been communicated, there is nothing to believe. Hence Romans 10 says, in connection with Israel: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”
Faith has its origin in the Word of God and therefore in God Himself. The common misunderstanding is that God “gives” faith, in the sense that the believing itself is a direct “gift” which He drops into some people and withholds from others. People ask: “How do I get my faith?” – “From God, for He gives it to me.” That sounds pious, but it is wrong. God gives His Word and calls man to believe. Whether someone is a believer or not is that person’s own responsibility.
If it were otherwise, God could never complain about unbelief. If the world is populated by unbelievers because God has simply decided not to “give them faith”, then their unbelief would, in the end, be His doing. On what grounds could He then reproach them? Yet, again and again, God does complain – for example in the Old Testament – about that unbelieving people who would not listen to Him.
The doctrine that God “gives faith” in that determinist sense is just a way of pushing human responsibility aside. It ties in with a certain view of “election”: that God arbitrarily picks people out, then hands them faith and repentance, and the rest is left in unbelief. From that you end up with church committees checking whether someone is “truly converted” – supposedly to see if God has really given them faith – and only then are they admitted to the congregation. “You cannot just admit everyone…”
These widely held ideas, developed in confessions and theological literature, are simply not biblical. Scripture says: faith is by hearing, and

hearing is by the Word of God. If the Word of God does not come, there can be no faith. God must first give His Word – which He has done. The responsibility then lies with man to actually believe.

Acts 3:17
17 And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.
Now we come to the practical outcome of all this. The general state of the Jewish people in those days is this: they acted “through ignorance” – both the people and “your rulers”.
In New Testament language, “rulers” is often the term for members of the Sanhedrin, also called the “chief priests”: those among the priests who sat in the High Council, regarded as a kind of continuation or revival of the council of elders established in the days of Moses. They were the highest Jewish leaders.
The spiritual leaders are, first of all, blameworthy, because as representatives of the people they ought to have had more understanding than the people themselves. What matters now is that, having been told these things, they might be delivered from that ignorance (which arose because of unbelief) and yet come to faith in the Word of God and thus in the Lord Jesus Christ – belatedly, since they had not done so before.
There was a veil over the glory of God. Paul speaks of this in:
2 Corinthians 3:14–16
14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ.
15 But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart.
16 Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away.
By turning (repenting) “to the Lord” the veil – the Law, their “table” – will be removed. By whom? By the Lord Himself.
And that applies not only to Jews, but to all who live under Law – that is, under religion. Under Law one does not actually need to believe: you simply keep to the rule-book. Do this, do that, don’t do this, don’t do that; stay neatly within the religious culture. Such people have a religion but do not stand open to faith.
Religion, then, must be replaced by faith. That was Israel’s problem: they had a Bible, but they did not understand biblical truth. They should have allowed themselves to be taught by Scripture. Ignorance springs from Law, from religion, from everything that has been laid on top of the Bible. That was Israel’s situation; Acts 3 demonstrates it.
And that is the first purpose of the Law: to demonstrate that it does not bring man to God, but actually makes it impossible for him to come. One has to be freed from that whole religious system in order to come to wisdom. Saul must first be removed from the stage before David can reign. Only after that does the story move on, for God’s intention is that Solomon should come: the personification of God’s wisdom. There you reach the heart of things – but something else has to happen first. In any

case, Saul must disappear. Saul is a picture of the dominion of the Law. David pictures the New Covenant, under which we live, if things are as they should be – not under Saul, but under David. Solomon then stands for the completion of salvation history, when everything is brought together and set in order, and the wisdom of God is fully displayed.

Acts 3:18
18 But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.
Law was given to demonstrate that man is a sinner. The Law is therefore a "ministration of death". It causes sin to increase; it shows that, through Law, man is driven further away from God. It has, in that sense, the opposite effect. And yet the Law is also "a shadow of good things to come" (Hebrews 10:1), and "the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did" (Hebrews 7:19). The Old Covenant is a picture of the New. One must look through it. If you fix your gaze on the Law itself, you will see nothing beyond it – it becomes a veil.
God has used that ignorance, that veil of the Law, to reach His goal. This is the theme of "mystery":
1 Corinthians 2:7–8
7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:
8 Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
There were things written in the Old Testament that were hidden – not clearly spelled out. They spoke of the glory of the Church, of "our glory", and they were part of God's plan "before the world". This mystery was deliberately kept hidden from the world, and especially from "the princes of this world". Had they understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. Then Christ would not have won His victory.
They drove Him to death, thinking they would win that way – not realising that, because they were unbelieving, a veil lay over the Scriptures for them. They did not know that, for Him, a door would be opened on the other side of death. Satan drove Him into death, not realising that, by so doing, he would actually bring God's plan of redemption to fulfilment and that, in this way, a new creation would come into being – and thus the devil's power would be definitively broken. Had he known, he would have done everything possible to keep Christ alive.
The sufferings of Christ in verse 18 refer to the period before He became "the Christ". He had to suffer first, and through that path become the Christ. "The Christ" by definition has eternal life and is glorified; He cannot suffer or die. But He was exalted through that way of humiliation. That is what Acts 2 and later the epistles explain.
And this was "by the mouth of all his prophets". That same expression is used in the story of the Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:27), where the risen Lord demonstrated "in all the scriptures, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, that Christ must needs have suffered, and to enter into his glory." In that way He would become the Christ. All God's prophets have spoken of this, though in a hidden way.

So even if it was a “mystery”, that does not mean it was unknowable. It was there in the Scriptures all along. With that background, Peter now turns to his audience in Solomon’s porch, the people gathered at the temple, and continues his appeal.

Acts 3:19
19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;
Peter here addresses the whole Jewish nation, on the basis of the healing of the lame man.
“Repent ye” and “be converted” is really saying the same thing twice. If they want to be “made better”, they must turn around – to the Lord, of course – “that your sins may be blotted out”; that is, with certainty.
They must first repent, and then their sins will be wiped out. If they refuse, they sin against the Risen One – what Scripture calls “sinning against the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 12:32).
The words “when the times of refreshing shall come” should really be understood in the sense of “so that the times of refreshing may come”.
The idea of “refreshing” is that the burning heat of “the fierceness of the wrath of God”, “the day of his fierce anger” (cf. Isaiah 13:13), is relieved.
“Times of refreshing” imply rescue from wrath.
“Times of refreshing” is a way of describing the New Covenant – a time of renewal. People are revived, become active and alive again. That fits perfectly in this chapter: the whole incident is about revival, pictured in this lame man who is restored. It all comes from the Lord.
But Peter adds: “from the presence of the Lord”. “Presence” (literally: “face”) means the visible manifestation, the outward appearance of someone – the Lord actively making Himself known.

Acts 3:20
20 And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:
The sense is not “He shall have sent”, but: if they repent, then He will send.
The text strictly reads “Christ Jesus”, i.e. the Messiah Jesus, the One promised beforehand in the Old Testament. He was “preached before” in the prophets, and in fact already in Genesis.
In Genesis 22, God says to Abraham:
“And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 22:18).
There the Christ was already being preached. He will actually be sent to Israel as a nation when they repent as a people. In the meantime we are in verse 21, where it says of that Christ:

Acts 3:21
21 Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

Christ has already appeared – in His resurrection. Since then “the heaven must receive” Him. He is there now, “sat down on the right hand of God” (Hebrews 10:12).
All those things that are to be “restored”, of which the prophets spoke, will be restored after at least the Jewish people have come to repentance. That will not happen until the end of Daniel’s seventieth week, for we know in Scripture when Israel will repent: when they call upon His Name at the end of that seventieth week. Then the Lord will return.
The word “restitution” (restoration) here is drawn from what happened to the lame man. Peter had said: “Rise up and walk”, took him by the hand and lifted him up. In the same way God will raise up, first Israel, and then in a wider sense the whole of humanity – and even the whole creation. The story ends with a creation where sin no longer rules, where righteousness dwells, and where death no more reigns. That will ultimately be brought about.
All of this waits, however, for the repentance of the Jewish people.
In Romans 8 we read that creation itself is waiting – namely for “the manifestation of the sons of God” (Romans 8:19). When will those sons of God be revealed? When Israel comes to faith.
Who are the sons of God? The Church. When Israel comes to faith at the end of the seventieth week, then not only the Lord will appear, but the Lord together with His Church – not just the one Son of God, but the sons of God:
“When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” (Colossians 3:4)
So everything waits for Israel’s repentance. The consequence is: if we are to appear with the Lord to Israel, that automatically means we must already have been taken up to Him beforehand.

Acts 3:22
22 For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.
Moses is mentioned here because of the phrase just before: “by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (v.21). The prophets of the Old Testament spoke, in Old Testament times, about the days that began here with the resurrection of Christ – about the New Testament days.
And usually such lists begin with Moses, because he is regarded as the earliest prophet. Besides that, Israel generally appeals to Moses as its authority.
Peter is directly citing:
Deuteronomy 18:15
“The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;”

Acts 3:23
23 And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.

If someone refuses to heed this Prophet – the Messiah – he will be cut off from the people. Yet Romans 11 says:
“And so all Israel shall be saved” (Romans 11:26).
That obviously only applies to believers who actually belong to that people; not to those who are cut off. They must listen to this Prophet.
Peter is still expounding Deuteronomy 18, where we read:
Deuteronomy 18:16–19
16 According to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not.
17 And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken.
18 I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.
19 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.
Moses can be seen as the mediator of the Old Covenant of law. Quite often Scripture says “Moses said”, when in fact it was the Lord speaking through Moses. The law was “ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator” (Galatians 3:19), and that mediator was Moses.
If a Prophet “like Moses” is to come, we can now understand, looking back, that this is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Mediator of the New Covenant. Hebrews 3–4 compares Moses and Christ: it lays out some similarities – both are faithful in all God’s house, both belong to the people, both are God’s servants for the sake of the people – but also the differences: Christ is also the Heir and the Builder of the house.
When that Prophet like Moses comes, He will speak everything – the full counsel of God. Moses only revealed part of it. In Deuteronomy 29:29 Moses says:
Deuteronomy 29:29
“The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.”
In other words, there is more to know about God’s plan, but He was not making it all known to Israel at that time. The implication is that these hidden things would be revealed in the future. That future revealing is exactly what Peter is now part of: he is confronting his tradition-bound Jewish hearers with truths they do not know – “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (cf. 1 Peter 1:11). They knew nothing of that.
Nor did they know that before the Messiah sets up His kingdom, the people must first repent. That is why orthodox Jews are still waiting for the Messiah. They can wait as long as they like, but He will not come while they remain in unbelief, because they still refuse to call upon the Name of the Lord – that is strictly forbidden in orthodox circles. If it stays like that, the Lord would never come.
Therefore He Himself will see to it that it does not stay like that. Peter is confronting them exactly with these statements from Moses and says, in

effect: “This is the Prophet you must hear; if you do not, you will be cut off from among the people.”

Acts 3:24
24 Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.
In the Jewish ordering of the Old Testament, the “Prophets” as a section of Scripture start with Samuel. Peter says that all those prophets, as many as have spoken, have proclaimed these days in advance – i.e. these New Testament days.
Very strong emphasis is laid on this: that all the prophets spoke of exactly these things. Verse 21 had already said so; verse 24 repeats it twice.
It should be clear that they spoke of blessings that would come to Israel on the basis of faith in the God of Israel. That is precisely what Peter is talking about here.
Paul later says the same in Acts 13:
Acts 13:32
“And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers,
God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again;”
They accused him of teaching that Jews must “fall away from Moses”. Paul replies: I do not teach that at all. I teach that everything Moses spoke is now being fulfilled. That is not abandoning Moses; it is the exact opposite. Moses made promises, and they are now coming to pass.
For the Jews that practically means: the end of Judaism. They must now, in reality, become Christians – that is, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Some today prefer the term “Messianic Jews”, but Scripture has a much shorter word: “Christians” – in Greek, Christoi. That is one of the biblical languages, and certainly the language of the New Testament.
It is quite simple: a Jew becomes a Christian when he comes to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter says here that all the prophets preached these things beforehand to the fathers.

Acts 3:25
25 Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.
Which covenant is this? Not even the Old Covenant of Sinai is mentioned, but an earlier one – the covenant with Abraham. Moses’ name is not brought in here, but Abraham’s.
“The covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham…”
God did not give Abraham the Mosaic law – certainly not later rabbinic Judaism – but He gave Abraham a promise. And that, too, is called a covenant. In Scripture, “covenant” often carries the sense of a one-sided promise.
We tend to think a covenant must be mutual, from two sides. But in the biblical usage, in Hebrew and Greek alike, it can be entirely one-sided:

God binding Himself. It is sometimes described as “the covenant of promise”.
Here it is the covenant with Abraham.
God said to Abraham:
Genesis 22:18
“And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”
Peter quotes this and says: “Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant…”
Paul explains this in Galatians:
Galatians 3:16
“Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.”
It is a Messianic promise to Abraham: all the families of the earth will be blessed – all nations, all humanity, not Israel only. It is a universal promise, and it will be fulfilled as such.
Galatians 3 refers to this several times, and says:
Galatians 3:6–9
6 Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.
7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.
8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.
9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.
Those who are “of faith” are Abraham’s sons, and therefore his heirs.
The “seed of Abraham” is the Man who will judge all mankind. The question is: are we righteous? If we believe as Abraham believed, our faith is counted to us for righteousness, and we have nothing to fear from that Judge. Then He becomes the One who blesses us.
All the families (peoples) of the earth will be blessed – Gentiles too, Scripture stresses. All this is in force since the resurrection of Christ.
Ultra-dispensationalism claims that the Church and salvation for the Gentiles do not properly begin until some later point in Acts – towards the end, or somewhere mid-way. I regard that as nonsense. Does the Church begin with the resurrection of Christ or not? Scripture is clear: yes. From the very start the Gospel is preached to the Gentiles, and later even specifically entrusted to them.
The Gospel was and is not specifically, let alone exclusively, meant for the Jews.

Acts 3:26
26 Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.
Here Peter alludes again to the Old Testament, where the Lord is presented as the “Servant of the LORD”. That Servant has been sent first to them. The King of the Jews first made the Gospel known within His own tribe – because they did not actually know it; they were unbelieving.

People often reason like this: in the Gospels, Jesus and the disciples "offered the kingdom" to the Jewish people. After the resurrection, the disciples carried on offering the kingdom to Israel. This sounds plausible, but it is a twisted way of putting it.

What was preached was the Gospel, and therefore the King of that kingdom. Even though in the letters to the Church we seldom see the Lord explicitly called "King", that does not mean He is not King now. Scripture clearly says He is:

- He is "crowned with glory and honour" (Hebrews 2:7, 9).
- He is "a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" – priest and king in one (Hebrews 5:10).
- He is "the head over all things" (Ephesians 1:22).

The popular story that "the kingdom" was officially offered to the Jews and not to the Gentiles is simply unbiblical. You do not read in Acts that "the kingdom" was offered to the Jews. You read that the King was preached – not only to Jews but also to Gentiles. It had to start somewhere, and that is logically with the Jews. Acts, in its early chapters, therefore concentrates on them.

One of the key marks of our present dispensation is precisely that in our days the Gospel is preached by Gentiles to the Jews. That is the world turned upside down. It ought to have been the other way round – and in the future it will be so again.

Before the crucifixion the nation was officially given opportunity to believe. After His resurrection the situation is repeated: again they are called to repentance and faith.

Some say: "In Acts 28 Paul preaches to the Jewish leaders in Rome; they do not believe; then he says, 'Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles…' – there is the final rejection of the kingdom." But had they not always rejected Him?

If you are talking about the people, you should not look at Jewish leaders in Rome, but at the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem – the chief priests, the Sanhedrin. They had always rejected Him – long before Acts 28, even before the Lord's earthly ministry. They crucified Him; that is unbelief, not faith.

When the Sanhedrin condemned Jesus, that was not the moment they became unbelievers; it was the confirmation of a settled unbelief, already shown throughout the years and already recorded by the post-exilic prophets. In the days of Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Ezra and Nehemiah, the people were unbelieving.

They returned from Babylon with what we now call "Judaism" – a man-made religious system developed there. The prophets testified that this worship did not serve the Lord. At the same time they foretold when Israel would serve Him: under the New Covenant. Then they would repent, not only of their personal sins but also of that invented Judaism.

From the very beginning of Acts, therefore, salvation – the Word of God and with it the priestly responsibility – was being handed over to Gentiles. The historical basis for this is the unbelief of Israel as a nation. That is why, throughout Acts, you see the Sanhedrin turning up again and again,

or Jewish leaders wherever Paul travels. Everywhere it becomes clear: the Jews do not accept the Gospel.
It is not primarily a matter of “rejecting the kingdom”, but of rejecting the Gospel. They did not want the Lord Jesus. That rejection does not originate in Acts, nor even in the Gospels; it was there all along. They were utterly unwilling to accept the biblical Messiah, the “Christ of the Scriptures”, for He would necessarily bring an end to Judaism.
It is quite remarkable, from a human point of view, that a people who have been scattered for over two thousand years, and really longer, among all nations, have not dissolved and assimilated. They stubbornly maintain their separate identity. One can respect that on the one hand; on the other, this strong clinging to a distinct identity hinders them in accepting the Messiah. Because however you look at it: when the Messiah is truly received, that means the end of Judaism.
Holding on to Judaism means “there is no room for Him in the inn” – nor, if you like, in the camp. One is reminded of Israel in the wilderness in Moses’ day: the tabernacle was pitched outside the camp, instead of the camp being built around the tabernacle. Israel then faced a choice: if they truly wanted to serve the LORD, they had to go outside the camp to Him – out into the wilderness. The camp stands for Judaism. One must go out from it to come to the Messiah.
Officially, Judaism “expects” the Messiah; in reality, it rejects Him as He is revealed in Scripture, and prefers its own picture of Him.
The Jews have precedence – but only in the sense that the Gospel is preached to the Jew first, not that there is a different Gospel for them. In the Church itself, there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile.
Scripture states that plainly:
Romans 10:12
“For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.”
Romans 3:9
“What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin;”
There is no distinction for God. Jews are not “better” or “superior” to Gentiles. Their claim that they possess the Law does not help them; whether you have the Law or not, you cannot keep it anyway, so it makes no difference – “all have sinned”.
And so Paul can say:
Romans 1:16
“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”
The order is: first the Jew, then the Greek – but it is one and the same Gospel, one and the same Christ, one and the same salvation.

Acts 3:26
26 Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

This points back to the Old Testament, where the Lord is presented as the "Servant of the LORD". That Servant was sent first to them – to Israel. The King of the Jews first made the Gospel known within His own tribe, because they did not in fact know it; they were unbelieving.
People often say: in the Gospels, the Lord Jesus and the disciples "offered the kingdom" to the Jewish people, and after the resurrection the disciples carried on offering the kingdom to Israel. That is not entirely wrong, but it is a crooked way of putting it. What was preached was the Gospel, and therefore the King of that kingdom.
Even though we do not usually call the Lord "King" in the Church epistles, because that title is not used there in connection with the Church, that does not mean He is not King now. Scripture says plainly that He is "crowned with glory and honour" (Hebrews 2:7, 9), that He is "a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Hebrews 5:10), and that God has made Him "head over all things" (Ephesians 1:22).
Ultra-dispensationalism claims that the Church and salvation going out to the Gentiles only begins at a later point in Acts – somewhere in the middle, or at the end. I consider that nonsensical. Does the Church begin at the resurrection of Christ, yes or no? Yes – Scripture is clear enough about that. From the very start the Gospel was preached to Gentiles, and later even specifically entrusted to them. The Gospel never was, and still is not, something specifically or exclusively meant for the Jews.

It is a striking fact in Judaism that a people who have wandered among the nations for some two thousand years – in reality even longer – have not simply dissolved or assimilated. They have not merged into the other nations. On one side you can respect that; on the other, this firm clinging to a separate identity hinders them in accepting the Messiah. However you look at it: when the Messiah is truly received, that means the end of Judaism. To cling to Judaism means, in effect, that "there is no room for Him in the inn" – or, we might say, in the camp.
That takes our thoughts back to Israel in the wilderness in the days of Moses. The tabernacle was set up outside the camp, instead of the camp being built around it. Israel then faced a choice: if they wished to serve the LORD, they had to go out to Him, outside the camp – out into the wilderness. The camp pictures Judaism. One must leave that camp in order to come to the Messiah.
Judaism officially "expects" the Messiah, but in reality rejects Him, because it prefers its own expectation of Him. That sounds contradictory, but that is the situation. People prefer to keep things as they are.
The Jews have priority, but only in the preaching of the Gospel. Beyond that, it is very easy to show from Scripture that in the Church as such there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile (Greek). It is written plainly, many times. For example:
Romans 10:12
For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

Romans 3:9
What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin;
There is no difference – neither of Jew nor of Greek. At any rate not for God. The Jews are not “better” or “superior” to the Gentiles. Their claim that they possess the Law does not advantage them. Whether you have the Law or not makes no difference, because you cannot keep it anyway. Therefore there is no distinction.
It is as Paul says:
Romans 1:16
For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Acts 4:1–5
1 And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them,
2 Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.
3 And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.
4 Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.
5 And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes,

The Sadducees had correctly understood that the apostles were preaching the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from among the dead.
The Sadducees had, as we would say, “demythologised” the Bible. They did not believe in miracles. They regarded the narratives of the Old Testament as mere stories. They believed only in what could be seen – not in an unseen world, and therefore not in the supernatural. But if one does not believe in an unseen world or in the supernatural, then in truth one does not believe in God at all.
They are therefore sharply annoyed – “very much displeased”, they “lost their peace”, we might say – because the apostles are teaching the people and proclaiming the resurrection as such. For them such a thing simply could not be.
The more conservative Pharisees, by contrast, had no real difficulty with resurrection. The Sadducees did.
The Sanhedrin was made up of “the rulers”. They are also called “the chief priests”, because the members of the Sanhedrin were, by definition, priests. The Sanhedrin is in fact the revival, the re-establishment, of the council of elders that had been set up in the days of Moses. With the invention of Judaism during the Babylonian captivity, people also re-created such a council of elders as their leadership.
They then “discovered” that the priests (the Levites among them) were, by virtue of their priesthood, elders. In that they were right: priests are elders. So a number of priests were put together as a “council of elders” –

this became known as the Jewish High Council, or the Sanhedrin. It was headed by the high priest. The king should have been the leader of the nation, but there was no king any more, because with the Babylonian exile the kingship from the house of David had ceased.
“Chief priests” and “elders” are essentially the same group here; and the “scribes” too, since priests were also custodians and teachers of the Word. In verse 5 the three terms really point to the same people. They gathered at Jerusalem and formed the Jewish government; there was nothing higher among the Jews.

Acts 4:6
6 And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.
These men were present – all from the high-priestly family. Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas (see John 11 and 18). Apparently Caiaphas and Annas alternated in the office of high priest. Why, we do not know. What we do know is that at times the office of high priest was simply sold to the highest bidder. They did not always treat it very seriously within Judaism. We know nothing further of John and Alexander here, but the point is that the whole high-priestly clan is summoned. The full council of elders is assembled, as representatives of the people, to pass judgement in this matter.

Acts 4:7–10
7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?
8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,
9 If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole;
10 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.
This question is thoroughly religious in flavour: “By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?” You could paraphrase it: “On whose authority? By virtue of whom or what? From which ‘office’ does this come?” The answer, of course, is: from the Lord.
Peter is filled with the Holy Ghost, and that is the fulfilment of the Lord’s promise to him that, when brought before governments and rulers, it would be given him in that hour what he must speak (Luke 12:11–12). When someone is filled with the Holy Spirit, he begins to speak. When the Spirit – when the Lord Himself – becomes active, He speaks. If it had not been the Holy Spirit speaking through Peter, he would never have dared say what he now says.
The name “Israel” – ever since the ten tribes disappeared from view – is used for the two tribes, even though those are properly known as “Judah”. But in the development of Judaism, they claimed the name “Israel” for themselves. It is not immediately obvious, because they are indeed

descendants of Jacob (Israel). Even in the New Testament they are called by that name.
Strictly speaking, however, “Israel” means the ten tribes, or else all twelve. That Israel – all the tribes – will one day come to faith.
Here it is “the good deed done to the impotent man” that is under examination. It is that miracle which gives Peter the occasion to speak. That the man had been healed probably did not trouble the elders all that much; it is the message that accompanies the miracle that upsets them. Peter says, in effect: “You ought to know this.” In verse 10 he answers their question: “By what power?” – By the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead.
The very heart of the preaching is always: “whom God raised from the dead”.
When Peter then mentions “all the people of Israel”, I think that through this Jewish people, represented here by the High Council, he is at once looking on to all the tribes of Israel. Through this same Christ the whole people of Israel will one day stand up “whole” – healed and restored. This lame man is a picture of Israel as a nation. That people will rise and walk in the days of Christ’s return, when they call upon His Name.

Acts 4:11
11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.
In Hebrew, Psalm 118 actually says: “which was rejected by you sons”; the word “son” and “builder” (workman) are closely related. A son is, in principle, a builder, one who continues the family house.
“The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner” is a statement about God’s work in this present time. The Stone is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, rejected by the Jews – the builders – but nevertheless made “head of the corner”: the most honoured place in the building.
Peter is here giving thoroughly church truth, just as we find it later in Ephesians 2.
Only a few weeks earlier, in the Passion Week, the Lord Himself had cited this verse. In Matthew 21:42:
“Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?”
And He explains it in the next verse:
“Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” (Matthew 21:43)
So the Stone stands for the Kingdom too – but in reality it is Christ Himself, the King of that kingdom. The kingdom would be taken from the Jewish people (as a nation) and given to another nation that does bring forth fruit.
The “head of the corner” is the top stone of a building – like the capstone of a pyramid. That stone has the same form as the whole structure underneath, and so fits exactly on top. That Stone was rejected by the builders, but was given the most honoured place in the building.

That building is the Church – it turns out to be a holy temple. That closes the circle, because Psalm 118 was very likely written at the rebuilding of the temple in the days of Ezra. Now we are told that this Psalm applies to our present age.
In those days it was sung at the entry into Jerusalem. According to the Lord in Matthew 21, according to Peter here in Acts 4, and according to Paul in Ephesians 2, the builders are a picture of the Jewish leaders – officially the nation – who rejected the Messiah (the Stone), so that the kingdom as such came into the hands of another people.
Peter says the same again in his first epistle:
1 Peter 2:4–5 (KJV)
4 To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious,
5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.
That is a reference to Isaiah 28:16:
“Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.”
We are placed upon that Stone. He is the foundation; we are built upon Him.
“Shall not make haste” really means: will not flee away from Him. If you believe, you do not run away; you build on Him.
Isaiah also says the Lord will be both things at once: a sanctuary and a “stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence” – for the two houses of Israel (Isaiah 8:14). One house is the two tribes, the other the ten. The contrast is between those of the people who “know” but do not want Him, and the nations who do accept the Gospel.
In essence it is the contrast between those who trust in the Lord Jesus as Messiah, Redeemer and Saviour, and those who say: “By our own works we will manage quite well; we do not need that Jesus.”

Acts 4:12
12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.
There is no other name under heaven by which man must be saved.
“Given among men” means: placed in the midst of mankind, belonging to the human race. Where did that Name come from? From heaven.
The Greek literally says “in men”, but because a plural follows (“men”), the translators rendered it “among”. The idea is: connected with mankind.
Only in Him must man be saved. The verse begins with the word salvation and ends with “saved”; that is the subject throughout. In principle it means new birth, deliverance from sin and guilt, and the receiving of new life. That we also receive a heavenly destiny is not mentioned here, but it is wrapped up in our salvation.
It is this Man – the Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth from verse 10 – whose Name has been given among men, and by that Name we must be saved.

Peter speaks of “among men”, not “among the Jews”. Then he says “we”, which, at that moment, means Jews, his hearers included. So Peter is thinking first of humanity in general, and only then, in a second step, of the Jews – in that order. Whereas people usually try to have us think the other way round.
“There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” is indeed spoken to Jews here. This is precisely the message that should be preached to them – and Peter is doing so. There is no other Gospel. The Jews are not saved in some different way because they are Jews, nor by the Law, but by the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ – the very Name they have always rejected. In Him they must believe; in Him they will be saved.
Peter does not say: “We are Jews, the chosen people; it is a pity you do not see it yet, but do not worry, you are Jews and it will all come right when the Messiah returns and all Jews are automatically saved.” No, nothing of the sort. The only way – for Jew and Gentile alike – is this: “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13).

Acts 4:13–18
13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.
14 And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.
15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves,
16 Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it.
17 But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.
18 And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.
We still know the verb “to flatten / to level” in English; it is to bring down, to cut down. From that you get “low, common”. Here “unlearned and ignorant men” means: men of low status, ordinary folk, nothing “special” or distinguished in the worldly sense.
Likewise with the older word “common” or “vulgar”: originally it simply meant “like everyone else”, not refined or set apart. Today we say “ordinary” or “general” where older English would say “common”. Same idea: nothing outwardly remarkable.
The Sanhedrin notice the boldness of Peter and John. Boldness in Scripture is always linked with service for the Lord – confidence to speak and act in His name.
They “marvelled” – they simply did not understand what was going on. How could such plain, unschooled men speak like this? But “they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus”. That is where Peter and John’s understanding came from – and their boldness too.

There was another argument they could not get around: the healed lame man standing right there beside them. That case was public knowledge by now. They could not deny it. It “couldn’t” happen – and yet it had. How? Only by the Name of Jesus. That is the only explanation, and it fits perfectly with all the other signs the Lord Jesus had done.
So the miracle is known; everyone in Jerusalem has heard of it. But the Jewish leaders’ first instinct is: how can we deny this? How can we get round it? Only when they realise they really cannot deny it does it become a serious problem for them.
Then the arrogance shows itself: “We disapprove, so it must stop.” Their solution is to threaten the apostles “straitly” – sternly – so that they will no longer speak to anyone in this Name. They cannot refute the miracle, so they try to suppress the message that goes with it.

Acts 4:19–20
19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.
20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.
Scripture does teach that believers should be subject to the governing powers. But first and foremost we are subject to the Lord; only then, and in second place, to earthly authorities. That is the proper order – it is a matter of hierarchy. You must obey the highest authority first; if after that you can also obey a lower authority, fine – until the two clash.
Peter and John simply cannot do anything else but speak of what they have seen and heard. When the Spirit works, He speaks. To forbid them to speak of Christ is to order them to disobey God. They leave the Sanhedrin to decide for themselves whether that can really be “right in the sight of God”.

Acts 4:21–22
21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.
22 For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.
The rulers threaten them even more, but still let them go. They can find no lawful way to punish them – and they feel the pressure “because of the people”. All the people are glorifying God for what has happened.
No government can just do whatever it likes; it depends on “the will of the people”. If the population refuses to go along, rulers risk being removed. Those in power need a base of support – people who follow and agree. Here they are hindered because there are at least five thousand believers in Jerusalem already.
So we see clearly: as a nation, Israel is still unbelieving; yet a large number of Jews have believed. They are not, however, the nation as such. The nation is officially represented by the Sanhedrin – and they want nothing to do with the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what it is about.

Peter and John are not condemned at this point because of the pressure of the people, who are enthusiastic about what has happened and would have stood up for the apostles if they had been condemned.
Verse 22 notes that the man was over forty years old. Humanly speaking: once you've passed forty, you don't "get better" – you start going downhill. Being healed at that age is a miracle – a work of God.
Symbolically: people consider it utterly impossible that Israel will ever come to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, yet it will happen. That is the point of the sign. When the "forty" is past, then comes the rest; then you come into the "five".
After the forty years in the wilderness, Israel under Joshua (Greek: Jesus) was brought into rest in the land. So too: only when this earthly life is behind us does the new life truly begin. Typologically, beyond the "forty" you reach the thought of new birth.

Acts 4:23–27
23 And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.
24 And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:
25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?
26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.
27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,
They return to their own company and report everything the chief priests and elders have said. The believers respond by lifting up their voice with one accord to God.
They address Him as the Creator – "which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is" – and then quote Psalm 2, which describes the situation in the world at large:
"Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?
The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ."
In Psalm 2 the kings and rulers "take counsel together" (that "together" lies behind the thought here) against the LORD and against His Anointed – His Messiah.
That Psalm describes the state of the nations in general, and it will describe the world again in the days of Christ's return: then too the Lord Jesus will be rejected. Here in Acts 4 it is already being stated that Psalm 2 applies to their own days.
Verse 27 applies it directly: Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the people of Israel have indeed gathered together against God's holy Servant Jesus, whom He anointed. Jew and Gentile together stand against the Lord and His Christ.

Acts 4:28
28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.
What were they doing, in God's eyes? They were rejecting the Lord Jesus – Gentiles and Jews together. That is happening already here, not just later in Acts 9, 11, or 28.
In Acts 4 it is already clear that Israel is unbelieving. There is no such thing here as some "inserted dispensation" where the Gospel is first being offered to the Jews as if everything lay ready for them to pick up. That idea simply is not in the text.
Rather, once again it is being established that they are unbelieving – and that they always have been. And that, astonishingly, is precisely in line with the counsel of God. Not His desire or "wish", but His counsel – His judicial decision as Judge. That is what "counsel" means: a considered verdict, a settled plan.
God had, a thousand years in advance, already determined that this would be the position of Jews and Gentiles: that after He had set His Son in His place (resurrection), both Gentiles and Jews would be unbelieving. That is how it would be. Nothing is happening here that was not expected.
The Lord knew it beforehand and has ordered His plan in harmony with that fact – hence "thy counsel determined before".

Acts 4:29–30
29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,
30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.
Their prayer is that they may speak the Word with boldness, and that the Lord will confirm that Word – as He is known to do – by signs and wonders. The central thing is always the Word of God. That is what the world does not want. That Word is to be spoken, and spoken openly. For that there is, at times, real courage needed, because there is always opposition to the Gospel.
Those who preached in the early days drew boldness from the fact that "God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will" (Hebrews 2:4), confirmed their preaching.
Generally those signs were healings, which served to authenticate the message as truly from God. Once that divine "stamp" has been clearly given, there is no need for those signs to continue in the same way. That is why you only see them in this first phase of our present dispensation, as recorded in Acts.

Acts 4:31
31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.
Whatever precisely this "shaking" was, it reminds us of Acts 2:

“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.”
You could say: the place where they were gathered was “moved”. In any case it is a visible sign that the Spirit is active – a confirmation from God.
Here in Acts 4 it does not say that they “spake with tongues”; it says they “spake the word of God with boldness”. As believers, knowing the Word, they spoke it out. If you do not know the Word, you cannot speak it.
The point is: the Word of God will be spoken – even if it is forbidden – and it will be spoken with boldness, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 4:32–33
32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.
33 And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.
“Common” here means shared – held in common. Of course believers still had possessions, but they themselves belonged to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the owner of the whole Church.
That does not mean all belongings were simply redistributed. It does mean that believers cared for one another and made their goods available as needed.
Again, notice in verse 33: the apostles give powerful witness not primarily of the crucifixion of Christ (though that is never denied), but of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The heart of the message is always the resurrection. If everything stops at the cross and the grave, there are only losers. Without the resurrection we are, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, still in our sins and those who have died are perished.
So: “great grace was upon them all.” The reign of grace has been established through the resurrection of Christ. If you do not know that, or do not preach it, if that is not central in any preaching, you have lost the very essence of the Gospel – and thus of salvation itself.

Acts 4:34–35
34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,
35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.
No one among them suffered material lack. Those who owned lands or houses (note the plurals) sold them, brought the proceeds, and laid them at the apostles’ feet for the benefit of the believers in need. Distribution was then made “according as he had need”. Whoever lacked nothing received nothing.

Acts 4:36
36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

Strictly speaking the name means “son of prophecy”; “son of consolation” is more a free rendering of the thought. Prophecy is expected to bring comfort, because it speaks of things to come, of the better promises of the New Covenant. That is why prophecy and consolation are closely linked, and why the name is interpreted in that way.
In the KJV they left the Greek form “Joses”; but the modern translations translates it as “Joseph”. So the Barnabas of Acts was actually called Joseph – “son of the New Covenant”, as the expositor puts it: heir of the New Covenant.
He was a Levite by birth, and came from Cyprus. That makes things quite layered symbolically. He is called Joseph, like the patriarch Joseph; that links him to Judah through the Lord’s family line, but he is also a Levite, so not of Judah – and yet still a Jew. On top of that he is from Cyprus, an island of the sea.
The question is: what does this man represent in the picture? He is taken as a type of the ten tribes of Israel, after the resurrection – more specifically Efraim, or Joseph if you will. Hence his name. Just as the Lord had a father and an uncle called Joseph (Joseph the husband of Mary, and Joseph of Arimathea), both seen as types of the ten tribes.
You then arrive at Efraim, Joseph’s official heir, the one with the birthright. That people – so runs this line of interpretation – officially accepted the Gospel once the Jewish people, under the Sanhedrin, had officially rejected the Lord Jesus. That people are identified with the Britons. According to Roman Catholic tradition as well, the Britons were the first to receive the Gospel. In A.D. 598 Augustine was sent by Pope Gregory I to Britain to preach the Gospel there. Augustine himself, however, writes that he found there an already centuries-old Christian church, founded by the apostles themselves.
Joseph of Arimathea is said to have brought the Gospel to Britain about four years after the resurrection. This is reported, among others, by Baronius (Caesar Baronius, 16th-century “father of church history”). According to this tradition, both royal houses of the Britons – two families – came to faith and declared their lands to be Christian. One in the south of England (Cornwall, Somerset), the other in Wales. In that sense Britain becomes, geographically, the “heart” of Christendom in that interpretation.

Acts 4:37
37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.
Barnabas owns a field and sells it; he brings the money and lays it at the apostles’ feet, for the same purpose as in verse 34: to support the believers in need.
The picture drawn is this: the Church, practically speaking, lives from the resources of the ten tribes of Israel. Or you can turn it round: the riches of Christendom are the riches of the Celts and Anglo-Saxons. What those peoples possessed became, when they became Christians, the property of the Christians.

Like Jacob’s wealth once became the possessions of Laban’s household, and then – by God’s ordering – Jacob’s own. The old Celtic culture has in that sense disappeared into, and been transformed by, Christian culture. Modern “Celtic hype” is largely romantic reconstruction. There are no real contemporary sources for ancient Celtic culture; their culture was not transmitted in writing. The peoples we now call “Celtic” only began to write after they had become Christian – so what is written is already no longer purely “Celtic”, but Christian. If people today claim to revive “Celtic music” or the “Celtic harp”, it is largely imagination.
The point of the passage here is: the blessings of the Church are pictured as coming especially from this “Joseph of Cyprus”. The blessings of the disciples since the resurrection also came, in the Gospel story, from a Joseph – Joseph of Arimathea – who likewise laid what he had at the service of the Lord and His apostles.

Acts 5:1–6
1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,
2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.
3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?
4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.
5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.
6 And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.
Building upon what began in chapter 4:34, we come to Ananias and Sapphira.
Joseph, surnamed Barnabas, is a type of the ten tribes of Israel.
Everything is well: he dedicates his life and everything he possesses to the service of the Lord.
Ananias and Sapphira—viewed as one, for they were married—represent the Jewish people, Judaism. The Jewish people were supposed to serve the Lord, yet what they had to offer was insufficient, and so they disappeared from the stage.
Joseph of Arimathea gives all that his labour yields to the Lord. That suffices. In contrast stand Ananias and Sapphira. They do offer what their lives produce to the Lord. They do give—yet it is still not enough.
Every person ought to believe the Word of God; to completely “give” himself; to accept and receive it; to place his trust in it one hundred percent. By doing so he is saved and receives new life.
One may be Jewish and attempt to live according to the law that belongs to it, but that does not make one pleasing unto God. One is not saved by it.
Everything one can produce under the law, however much it may be, is not sufficient.

This is a depressing matter, and therefore a person must be delivered from it. This is set forth here through this couple.
On the other hand, there is also deceit. That too belongs to the law. The pretence, being a “Pharisee”, hypocrisy, is inherent to life under the law. One cannot keep the law; and if one nevertheless strives after it and pretends to do so, one must become a hypocrite. One becomes insincere and life becomes a great lie.
All of life under the law is lying to God. Verse 4: “thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.” In life under the law one deceives oneself, lies to oneself, but just as much to the Lord.
Ananias would be Hananja in Hebrew and means “Jehovah is gracious”. I will return to Sapphira later. Through the account of Ananias and Sapphira, reference is made to the law.
The law does indeed proclaim that Jehovah is gracious. The law is a shadow of good things to come. (Hebrews 10:1)
The law speaks of atonement, forgiveness, receiving grace, mercy—although none of these truly exist under the law itself. Whoever transgresses the law is executed.
The law is an “introduction to a better hope.” (Hebrews 7:19)
The law speaks of coming realities. All those rites and social laws are in some way foreshadowings of situations under the New Covenant, and thus of the reign of grace.
This is found in the name Hananja, “Jehovah is gracious”, as an indication of what the law is.
The law in itself does not remain. It is temporary, and this has been stated in advance. Verse 5: “Ananias … fell down, and gave up the ghost.”
The Jewish people, under Judaism, the Jewish religion, fall short and die. They fall under the judgement of God. It is a passive judgement, which means that God does not intervene. They are left to their fate.
This is the judgement of God over the world up to this day. Since the rejection of the risen Christ by the nations, God has let them go.
This judgement over Ananias is therefore a picture of the judgement upon the Jewish people, upon life under the law as such. Through the Jewish people it speaks essentially of a judgement over the entire world. It leads to death.

Acts 5:7–11
7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.
8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.
9 Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.
10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.
11 And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

Sapphira meets the same fate as Ananias. What business was it of the disciples that they held something back? But we should not concern ourselves with ethics. Ethics is law. We live only by grace, by which the Lord richly grants us to enjoy of His grace (1 Timothy 6:17). There is nothing wrong with that. By grace you may contribute to the work of the Lord, and by grace you are not required to.
Therefore the question should not be: What is the ethical basis of the judgement that comes upon them from God?
The question must be: What does this mean?
The Bible contains a similar typological account in Exodus 4, where the LORD “sought to kill” Moses. Strange, is it not? The name of Moses’ wife is Zipporah. That is Hebrew; Sapphira is Greek. There Moses is a type of the law, and Zipporah—who as his wife was expected to serve her husband—of the people who lived under the law, the Jewish people.
It concerns the “bridegroom of blood”.
The deliverance from Egypt is a picture of being led out of the house of bondage: delivered from the law, from religion, from this world. This can only be through death and then rebirth, symbolised in circumcision, by which the “next generation” brings deliverance.
It is a repetition of the same history. No distinction is made, and it is said that they “agreed together”. Nevertheless, it was three hours later. This speaks about our present dispensation, lying roughly between the judgement upon the Jewish state in the past and that which is to come.
These “three hours” appear again in Scripture: a period of three hours of darkness—from the sixth until the ninth hour—concerning the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus (Luke 23:44). These three hours of darkness are a picture of our present world, in which the Light has disappeared from the world. They reject the Lord Jesus Christ and thereby the Light of the world. Where light exists, it does not shine in the world, but in our hearts—not in the world, but in the Church.
The judgement upon Sapphira means that the judgement upon the Jewish people will come once more, after a period of time. Including the destruction of the Jewish state as such and the devastation of Jerusalem. Ananias is a picture of the Jewish people in the past, and Sapphira of the people in the future. In both cases the same judgement befalls them on precisely the same grounds: namely that they, then and now, cling to the law and to the Old Covenant, although by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus it has lawfully and in accordance with Scripture been brought to an end.
In any case, they are as unbelieving as they were at Jesus’ first coming. Just as the unbelief of the Jewish nation was the cause of a judgement of God upon the nation, so it will be in the future as well.
Verse 10: “the young men came in”. Young men in the Bible are always a picture of those who live under the New Covenant, of those who are born again—those who came later, who would arise afterwards. That is why the Lord is also prophetically designated as a “young man”.
What do young men do? They bury the old man who lived under the law. What do we do with our old man? We put him off (Ephesians 4:22).
The same applies to everything that comes to us from that old man,

including all those commandments and ordinances of “touch not, taste not, handle not” (Colossians 2:21).
The only thing that counts is the new man. Judaism does not count—the Church does. The word “Church” is used here for the first time in Acts 5 (in Acts 2:47 this word does not appear). Not that the Church arises only here, for it was of course already present before.
According to verse 11, these events made a great impression—not only because of the death of the two people, but also because of the prophetic meaning.

Acts 5:12–13
12 And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.
13 And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.
The apostles simply continued their work. These signs and wonders still confirmed their Divine commission. “For the Jews require a sign” says 1 Corinthians 1:22, and they received them. If they still did not believe—then so be it. The Lord gives these signs primarily “for mine own name’s sake,” He says to Israel. For the sake of My Word. I will show who I am: He who keeps His Word. Gracious, merciful, but also a righteous God.
The Church also serves as a demonstration of His grace, in which God primarily shows who He Himself is. The logical consequence would be that those who read it would trust in Him.
That the apostles gathered with one accord “in Solomon’s porch” had already been stated in chapter 3. It is a reference to the son of David—Solomon—a type of the Messiah in connection with the Kingdom that will be definitively established on the earth. Into that position, and against that background, the apostles are set.
Who are “the rest” who did not dare join them? Later it is stated that the chief priests (the Sanhedrin) were afraid to do anything to the apostles. They dared not; it seemed “politically unfeasible.” They feared the people. We have on one side the apostles, and on the other the people. Who then are “the rest”? It can only be the Sanhedrin.

Acts 5:14–16
14 And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.
15 Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.
16 There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.
Here it says: “And believers were the more added to the Lord.” Only “believers” is often placed in the wrong location in translations. This verse should be understood just as Acts 2:47. One must then belong to some church? People were added to a church? But that is not what is written.

Those who believed—they were added daily unto the Lord.
In Acts 2:47 it is “such as should be saved”.
Added unto the Lord, unto Christ, of course—unto the Church.
Here in verse 14 men and women wished to be healed by the shadow of Peter or one of the other apostles. It is also clear that they themselves did little regarding this. They merely walked past, and it already happened, so that it could hardly be credited to them. It was not their religion nor a natural act, nor even their prayer—it was the Lord Himself who did it. People came for healing not only out of Jerusalem, but also from the surrounding region. The work continued and was visible to all. These must have been clearly observable healings of diseases—from one moment to the next. They were signs.
Not: “It is better now; slowly I am improving. The Lord has healed me.” I do not say that this cannot happen. I only say that these are not the miracles and signs we find in Scripture.
There you find people who were crippled from birth, who from one moment to the next sprang up. The man had never taken a step in his life, yet: “Rise, take up thy bed, and walk”—and he walked. Another, who had also never walked, immediately began to leap. From one moment to the next healthy. Not a period of therapy or such things—clearly instantaneous, and that is a miracle.
The diseases mentioned—deafness, blindness, lameness—are irreversible. You do not recover from them. The same applies to the “healing” of unclean (evil) spirits. Normally impossible, and yet it happened as a wonder of God, again from one moment to the next.
One can apparently see that someone is possessed—that is demonic influence. When it disappears, one can also see it. The behaviour, the posture, and the expression of the eyes of the person change instantly. These things happened before those who were present. Also the casting out of unclean spirits. Thus it concerns signs, not the blessings of believing patients. It concerns signs primarily as evidence of where and how the work of God was done—not through the Sanhedrin, not through politics, not through the Jewish government, but through those few people who were sent by God.

Acts 5:17–23
17 Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation,
18 And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.
19 But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,
20 Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.
21 And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.
22 But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they

returned, and told,
23 Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within.
The common prison is for criminals. Not a word is said about how the Lord brought them out. It simply happened. They were put in prison, and that very night they were taken out; the next day they simply continued. This was indeed a miracle, but why? One could ask: could the Lord not prevent them being imprisoned in the first place? Why does He allow this? What is the point of it?
Because it illustrates the character of our present dispensation. These words should remind us of the opening verses of Isaiah 61, or else of Luke 4, where the Lord Jesus reads in the synagogue:
Luke 4:18–21
18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,
19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.
20 And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.
21 And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.
The Lord stops reading, although Isaiah 61 continues with the words: “and the day of vengeance of our God.” But that time had not yet come. Then He said, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.”
God raised Him up to proclaim glad tidings to the meek: among other things, “to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.” The translation “to proclaim freedom” is somewhat unfortunate; I believe it means that the captives are called out of the prison because the Lord has opened the door of the prison. That truth appears twice in Isaiah 61. Here, in Acts 5, it is fulfilled — the prison doors are opened and the disciples come out.
The spiritual meaning is victory over death. A prison is confinement, just as the realm of the dead holds people bound. “Prison” and “captivity” are not primarily architectural; it concerns those who are imprisoned, the people themselves — who as a whole are called “the prison”. Thus, the first occurrence of the word “prison” refers to the captives. They were captives and were taken captive.
God opened the door and said: now go and preach the Gospel. And that is exactly what happened, beginning in Western Europe — especially Britain. The Gospel had already reached Britain in the first century. From there it continued for centuries. Those who had been in prison received their commission: to speak in the temple to the people “all the words of this life.” That was precisely the reason they had been imprisoned. The angel of the Lord brought them out and said: continue doing exactly that. Yet from verse 24 onward they are simply taken prisoner again — this time

more politely, because the rulers feared the people, who were quick to stone others when angered.

Acts 5:24–27
24 Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.
25 Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.
26 Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned.
27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them,
They are arrested to appear before the council, but the angel releases them. Then they are arrested again and brought before the high council after all. So why release them at night? What is the point? Because it has prophetic meaning. What we see described here is generally a picture of the situation in our Church age, awaiting the return of Christ and the conversion of Israel.
You will not hear me claim that we are Israel by nature. We, from the Ten Tribes, were a people in exile — and still are. Now we — as the Church — are exiles on a higher level: “without the camp, bearing His reproach” (Hebrews 13:13). In biblical priority, the Church is placed above Israel. Yet the Church is indeed regarded as part of Israel, as the council of elders in Israel.
The temple is a type of the Church. Is the temple Israel? Yes — it is part of the nation. It was the most important building in Israel. Israel and the temple belong to the same people. Just as the elders of Israel — the council of elders appointed by Moses — were part of Israel. Were the elders themselves Israel? Yes — but at a higher level. They formed the government of Israel.
In our time, our position is that of exiles in the world. Yet we are prisoners of Jesus Christ — freedmen of the Lord, and yet His servants. Freed from the yoke of the Law. We have received a yoke which is gentle and light, under which we serve the Lord. We are freedmen of the Lord and continue with the one thing we are to do — the task for which we were freed: to stand, and in the temple speak to the people “all the words of this life.” The preaching that the Lord Jesus lives.
All these events take place around the temple. There is a very good reason for that. The temple itself is a representation of the Church, because in the temple and from the temple the Word of God was preserved and proclaimed.

Acts 5:28
28 Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.
This is no mere preaching, no mere opinion, but teaching — evangelisation — instruction in the truth.

According to the historian Flavius Josephus, in the days of Jerusalem's destruction (around AD 70) there were about 20,000 believers in Jerusalem. I do not know how many inhabitants Jerusalem had at that time; thus I cannot give a percentage. But 20,000 is very many for an ancient city. Here it says: "ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine." That means the Sanhedrin and the high priest were deeply concerned, because many came to faith through the apostles' preaching.
Perhaps there were even more than 20,000, as believers left Jerusalem. The Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem eventually became poor. Likely because those who could afford to do so simply left. They believed Jesus' words that Jerusalem would be destroyed. And if, near AD 70, there were still 20,000 believers there, then in the first years after Acts 2 there must have been many more.
The verse speaks of "this man", but note also the word "blood." It is one of the few places in Scripture where one could theoretically replace "blood" with "life". Normally "blood" in context signifies life. In effect they are saying: "You intend to bring the life (the blood) of this man upon us." For this is not about His crucifixion — they are not preaching His crucifixion. Not here. The apostles were not intending to lay responsibility for Jesus' death upon the Sanhedrin. Peter has already said, "I wot that through ignorance ye did it." (Acts 3:17)
The apostles bring "the life of this man" to Jerusalem. The goal is that these people — and ultimately the entire world — should believe in the Lord Jesus and thereby receive His Life.

Acts 5:29
29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.
Everything here serves as an illustration of our dispensation. We are indeed to obey human authorities (Romans 13). But when conflict arises, "We ought to obey God rather than men." If that causes problems, the choice is not difficult. One must obey God more. This is precisely what was already said in Acts 4:19. Naturally, God outranks men. And it is said again — to the Jewish high council.

Acts 5:30–31
30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.
31 Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.
In Acts 3:15 He is called "the Prince of life, whom ye killed."
The preaching is not the crucifixion but the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ. Therefore verse 30 says: "whom ye slew… hanged on a tree" — that is simply factual — in accordance with Deuteronomy 21:22 and Galatians 3:13: "… cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree."
But the sentence begins: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus."
That is His resurrection.
"… and exalted him with his right hand" — that is His ascension.

“to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.”
The Lord Jesus Christ has been Prince and Saviour only since His resurrection.
The term “Prince” here is not the ordinary word for prince, but archegos. After these two occurrences in Acts, it appears only twice more in Hebrews, translated “captain” or “author.”
It means “the First”, “the Originator”, “the One who goes ahead.” It concerns birthright. That becomes clear here in Acts, and especially in Hebrews (2:10 and 12:2) where this archegos is designated King and Priest after the order of Melchizedek — which necessarily implies firstborn rights. He is our example; we are to follow Him.

Acts 5:32–33
32 And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.
33 When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.
Thus in verses 30–32 we see, one after another: resurrection, ascension, and the giving of the Holy Spirit — all three on the first “Easter day.”
When the Jewish leaders heard this, “they were cut to the heart.” Literally: they leapt out of their skin — they were enraged and wanted to kill the messengers. As usual — we see this repeatedly in the Gospels.
The underlying thought is that the fulfilment of Old Testament promises in the Messiah means that the Jewish rulers could “go home”. The whole Sanhedrin. The Judaic nation, as a religious system, ends with the coming of the Messiah. Thus the Sanhedrin refuses to accept the fulfilment of those promises, because that means the end of their existence, their culture, their whole identity. This remains the great issue among the Jews to this day.
The Bible teaches that when a Jew comes to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, he ceases to be a Jew. The contemporaries of the disciples understood this. Today we have “Messianic Jews”, which only adds confusion. Formerly Jews came to repentance and became Christians, just as with the Gentiles. That is biblical. Whoever we are, we become believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore we are Christians.
The Jewish convert Isaäc da Costa was not a “Messiah-confessing Jew”. He was a Christian. The modern notion of Messianic Judaism suggests one can believe in the Lord Jesus and remain religiously Jewish. That is impossible. In this dispensation one is delivered from that system. The old gives way to the new.
Christians who preach the Gospel say to Jews: “Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” (Acts 2:40) The preaching is not: “Your system is fine, but Jesus is an addition.” No: let us go forth unto Christ “outside the camp”. To leave the entire religious Jewish structure.

Acts 5:34–36
34 Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and

commanded to put the apostles forth a little space;
35 And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.
36 For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.
Gamaliel reappears later in Acts 22, where Paul mentions him as one of his teachers. The historian Flavius Josephus also refers to Gamaliel as an influential teacher of the law in those days. He is regarded as the grandson of Hillel, the famous Jewish philosopher and rabbi.
According to Josephus, the Pharisees were a numerical minority in the Sanhedrin; yet their influence was so great that the Sadducees hardly dared oppose them. They had strong support among the people. That also explains what happens here. The council as a whole was under the chairmanship of Caiaphas, the Sadducee; but he does not get his way, because Gamaliel stands up, and the others align themselves with his reasoning. In addition, they still feared a riot among the people, so instead of dragging the apostles away in chains, they are asked — politely — to step outside for a moment.
Concerning how to deal with “these men”, Gamaliel addresses them as “Ye men of Israel” and points to a certain Theudas. This Theudas claimed “that he was somebody”, that he was significant. Yet it came to nothing. He was killed and his followers scattered. The whole movement fizzled out like a candle going out.

Acts 5:37–39
37 After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.
38 And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought:
39 But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.
Judas of Galilee is known also outside the Bible. He too “drew away much people after him”; he likewise perished, and his followers were scattered. Again, nothing lasting came of it.
Gamaliel’s conclusion is straightforward: if this whole thing is human work, it will collapse of itself. He had evidently learned from the Old Testament that human schemes do not ultimately stand, whereas what God does, do stand. So he insists: you cannot stop it if it is from God; and you might even be found to be fighting against God. It seems that Gamaliel was not entirely sure what was truly going on here — which makes his advice all the wiser.
Why is this recorded in Scripture? Because it applies directly to our present dispensation. These events do not only recount history; they characterise the subsequent course of Church history, and that of unbelieving and even hostile Judaism. The work of God cannot be stopped

— not by persecution of Christians, nor by attempts to silence the preaching. Gamaliel's statement is, for us, a clear affirmation of that fact.

Acts 5:40–42
40 And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.
41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.
42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.
This beating was probably the formal punishment for disobeying the order issued in Acts 4:18, where they had been strictly forbidden "that they speak henceforth to no man in this name." Now, with that command reiterated, they are released. That was the matter settled — humanly speaking.
We should not seek reproach or suffering; the disciples did not do that either. They were no masochists. But they did bear "His reproach" (Hebrews 13:13). We too, at times, bear something of that reproach — though, in comparison, it is hardly worth mentioning. In any case, the disciples did not stop. Daily, in the temple and in homes (literally "by the houses", i.e. at people's houses), they continued to teach and preach Jesus Christ.
Believers gathered in homes where that was possible. The idea of a special physical "house of God" in Christian practice — as a building — is completely unbiblical. Even the temple functioned as a place where anyone could speak. The disciples simply did so; they taught, expounding the Word of God — what the Old Testament had said concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. That faithful exposition of Scripture is undoubtedly why the Church grew so strongly: the message was correct.

Acts 6:1–7
1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.
2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.
3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.
4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.
5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:
6 Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.
7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples

multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

This section ends with the affirmation that the Word was preached, and that there was growth — people came to faith. But that also meant increased practical problems among the believers.

In verse 1 we immediately meet ordinary human tensions: people feeling overlooked. The “Grecians” murmured against the Hebrews because they felt their widows were being neglected. These “Grecians” were Jews of Greek culture and language — Greek-speaking Jews. There were indeed such people. Generally, Hebrew was used in the synagogues, but some synagogues used Greek as their main language.

Verse 9 later mentions Libertines, Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those of Cilicia and Asia. These were Jewish groups who, in their synagogues, used Greek. Those Alexandrian Jews were responsible for the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek — the Septuagint, produced in Alexandria in Egypt.

Greek-speaking synagogues were often not taken too seriously by the Hebrew-speaking synagogues. They were seen as somewhat “liberal” and thus looked down on. The feeling was: if you are truly Jewish, you ought to speak Hebrew, not Greek. No wonder these people felt treated as second-class.

It is not only the Word of God that we guard; we are also to care for one another’s earthly circumstances, as far as that lies within our responsibility. How far that should go is another discussion. But notice: we are dealing here with at least several thousand believers. Large numbers always mean more organisation is needed. In a smaller group, everyone knows everyone, and mutual care is simpler. When many gather, practical matters arise which must be organised.

The solution is sought in verse 3: they are to choose seven brothers, “of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom,” to deal with this matter. Although this concerns practical, material issues, the requirement remains that these men be spiritually qualified — full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. They are not appointed primarily to preach or teach (though they may be capable of that), but to handle these “household” matters: the distribution of goods and food — “serving tables”.

Those who are given such organisational responsibility must understand what the Church is and what it is for. If you entrust organisational matters to people who do not grasp that, things go wrong. Then the Church degenerates into a business. Peter warns later that false teachers will make merchandise of you (2 Peter 2:3). Today the institutional church has indeed become an international business. But the Church is not an earthly organisation; it is a heavenly organism. We are members of it; the Lord Himself governs it — and He does so primarily through His Word. If His Word is not used, He does not do His work. He works by the Word; that is why we gather.

Everyone who has responsibility in the Church should fully understand what the Church’s calling is. He must know what the work of God is, if he wants to be involved in it — even if his own task is mainly practical. If he

does not know, he will, sooner or later, be used by the devil to make a mess.
Note that these are the words of the twelve apostles (verse 2). They say: “whom we may appoint over this business.” That indicates that deacons are appointed by overseers — as we also see in 1 Timothy 3. They were appointed from above, as it were. That is the normal pattern. Timothy was appointed to his ministry by Paul — from above. In Acts 20, when Paul addresses the elders of Ephesus, he speaks of those “over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers.” The primary thing is the ministry of the Word of God. Organisation, to whatever extent needed, is subordinate to that. If the organisation is wrong, the Word cannot be rightly preached.
The work of the deacons is intended to relieve the apostles, so that they can give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. Thus several men are chosen, with the approval of the whole multitude, “full of faith and of the Holy Ghost,” to serve within the Church.
Verse 6 says they were set before the apostles; the apostles prayed, and then they laid their hands on them. Taking responsibility in the Church is certainly a matter for prayer. The laying on of hands signifies that certain responsibilities previously carried by the apostles are now transferred to these deacons.
I doubt whether there was always an actual physical laying on of hands in the way we imagine. It may have been a customary gesture in some cases, but what matters is the meaning. Just as when we say “I’ve gone into the boat” — we rarely mean it literally; the expression is often figurative. Similarly, “laying on of hands” is a fixed expression for the transfer of responsibility. That is how it works throughout Scripture. One person lays hands on another, and something is passed on — not material, but responsibility or identification. The Day of Atonement, when the high priest lays hands on the goat (Leviticus 16:21), is an example.
Today, people often link “laying on of hands” with receiving or being filled with the Holy Spirit. That is to wrench the phrase out of its biblical context. Scripturally, it is the transfer of something — here, part of the apostles’ responsibility to these deacons. A similar pattern appears later with the appointment of elders in Acts 13 and 14.
Where there is any organisation in the Church, it comes from above, and must remain subordinate to the preaching of the Word.
Verse 7: “And the word of God increased.” The Word of God grew — more and more people allowed the Word to be planted in their hearts. “And the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly.” “Disciple” here simply means “believer”. We have already seen such phrases earlier in Acts, so we understand there was an enormous number of believers in Jerusalem.
And then the special note: “a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.” That means many priests, from the tribe of Levi, came to faith — they submitted to the Word of God. Remarkably, it is mentioned specifically that priests believed. These Levites, priests under the Old Covenant, now become priests under the New Covenant. Their service is raised to a higher level — they now serve under Another “Levi” who replaces the former Levi (as announced in Malachi 2). That is the Lord

Jesus Himself, the Mediator of the New Covenant, the true Melchisedec, the High Priest, the true Levi — Christ together with the Church. Whatever role one had under the Old Covenant, under the New one serves the Lord. Those who were priests under the Old Covenant now become priests under the New — but **not** as “ministers of the law”, still less of Judaism. These priests of the Old Covenant being added to the priesthood of the New Covenant immediately produces conflict.

Acts 6:8–10
8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.
9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.
10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.
Stephen, one of the seven from verse 5, was therefore not only a servant who “served tables”, but also a minister of the Word. He did great “wonders and miracles” — he was “full of grace and power”. Grace is power. To Paul the Lord says, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” There is nothing as powerful as the grace that delivers us from the power of the law.
All those Greek-speaking synagogues — Libertines, Cyrenians, Alexandrians, those of Cilicia and Asia — gathered and disputed with Stephen. These Jewish colonies in foreign lands were perhaps even more conservative than the Jews in Jerusalem. They spoke Greek, but were probably more rigid and orthodox in spirit. That becomes evident here: “they disputed with Stephen. And they were not able to resist…” They had no power — that is what the word implies. They could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke — the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, “that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.”

Acts 6:11–15
11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.
12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,
13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:
14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.
15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.
Once again, someone stands before the Sanhedrin — now Stephen. Those bringing accusations show that for them Moses (that is: the Mosaic Law) is paramount. When the Lord Jesus was condemned, false witnesses were also brought forward, after He had said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” John comments: “He spake of the temple of his

body” (John 2:19–21). The death of the Lord Jesus means the end of the Old Covenant and the Law.
The Lord did not say that He would demolish the temple. He was killed by the Jews; thus He could say, “Destroy this temple…” — as if to say: if you do that, then… And they did do it. How exactly Stephen had preached we do not know, but the accusers claim to have heard him say that Jesus “shall destroy this place.” Perhaps he did say it — then it was figurative language for everything the temple stood for. The Lord had already foretold in Matthew 24 that not one stone of those buildings would be left upon another.
Stephen did not preach “against this holy place and the law” — they are explicitly called “false witnesses.” How then did they get the idea? Stephen must have said things that, twisted, could be used against him. They claim to have heard him say that Jesus of Nazareth would “destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.” The temple stands for life under the Law. If the temple disappears, life under the Law disappears with it. Then “the customs” (the whole religious culture) change. And indeed they must change — exactly as Moses had said. But they knew Moses’ words only in part, and did not believe them. The problem of Judaism is that, in practice, the Old Testament is not truly known. Thus they call Stephen’s words “blasphemous”, alleging that he is contrary to Moses, whereas in fact he is in full agreement with Moses. New-Covenant truth is based upon what the Old Testament has spoken; it is its fulfilment.
Stephen’s name means “crown”. Sometimes one thinks: poor man, with a name like that! For the result is that he is killed, as we see from Acts 7:54 onwards. He is stoned to death in thoroughly Jewish fashion. This illustrates that Judaism as such does not want the Crown — Christ Himself, in other words the Kingdom.
That is the background to this story, and likely one major reason it is included in Scripture. It demonstratively shows the attitude of the Jewish nation under the leadership of the Sanhedrin. After this, the Kingdom is hidden. The chapter ends with Stephen looking into heaven itself and seeing Jesus standing. They will not have the Crown, the Kingdom, on earth — certainly not under Judaism. In practice, the Crown is in heaven. What follows in chapter 7 is Stephen’s long speech, in which he summarises key aspects of Israel’s history.

Acts 7:1–7
1 Then said the high priest, Are these things so?
2 And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran,
3 And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.
4 Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.
5 And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his

foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.
6 And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years.
7 And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place.
“Men, brethren, and fathers” is a respectful address to the Sanhedrin — the leaders of the nation. Stephen acknowledges their rank, even though he must “obey God rather than men.” He approaches them respectfully, yet completely rejects their viewpoint.
God reveals His glory in the call of Abraham, described in Genesis 12. The divine plan of redemption — the entire structure of salvation history — rests upon promises made to Abraham. Stephen begins here, because everything that follows unfolds from that initial promise.
God promised future blessing. The heart of faith is simple: God has spoken about the future, and one believes Him. He is “the God of glory”, for God intends to reveal glory. He gives promises — but whenever fulfilment draws near, people do not want it. That is the whole history of Israel in summary. The climax of that history is this very moment: they will not accept the preaching of Stephen.
Abraham lived first in Ur of the Chaldees (present-day Iraq), then in Haran (Charran in the Greek text). He only left Haran after Terah his father died. Thus the journey was delayed. Even after he came into the land promised to him, he received no inheritance — “not so much as to set his foot on”. He lived as a stranger and a sojourner (Hebrews 11). He possessed nothing but a burial place. He was childless — and yet the promise stood firm.
Stephen emphasises that the promises were not fulfilled immediately, but remain certain. Only when the true seed of Abraham would arrive — the Messiah — will those promises be fulfilled. Isaac himself was not the ultimate fulfilment. The Christ is.
As for the “four hundred years” — they were not four hundred years in Egypt. That is impossible. Israel spent 215 years in Egypt. From Abraham’s calling at age 75 until the exodus under Moses was 430 years. If Israel had been 400 years in Egypt, that would leave only 30 years between Abraham’s calling and Jacob’s descent into Egypt — which is absurd, for the whole story of Isaac lies in between.
What Scripture says is that Abraham’s seed was “evil entreated” and afflicted for 400 years — beginning shortly after the birth of Isaac, through their time in Canaan, and continuing through their time in Egypt. From Isaac’s birth until the exodus is about 400 years. Of those 400 years, 215 were spent in Egypt. The rest were spent as strangers in Canaan — already suffering ill-treatment and being outsiders.

Acts 7:7–9
7 And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place.
8 And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat

Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.
9 And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him,
“The covenant of circumcision” is not the Law. It was given to Abraham centuries before the Law (Galatians 3:17). Circumcision is a sign pointing to new birth — as baptism does. Isaac is the child of promise. Jacob’s twelve sons are the patriarchs and become the fathers of the tribes of Israel. Immediately Stephen emphasises their jealousy — “moved with envy”.
That is the central pattern of Israel’s history — and it is repeated here in the Sanhedrin. In envy they sold Joseph — the very one with whom God was. When Israel rejects someone, God is generally found on the side of the rejected one. As the Sanhedrin rejects Stephen and has rejected Christ, they repeat history. Just as the brothers rejected Joseph, so they reject the One with whom God stands.

Acts 7:10–15
10 And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.
11 Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance.
12 But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.
13 And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh.
14 Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.
15 So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers,
Deliverance “out of all his afflictions” did not happen overnight. It took 13 years. God gave Joseph “favour and wisdom” — these two are inseparable. Wisdom comes from God, and is a manifestation of His grace. Joseph rises to govern Egypt.
Notice the pattern Stephen stresses: Israel rejected the one whom God later exalted — and through him God saved them. The first time Joseph appeared to his brothers, they rejected him. The second time he was revealed to them. This anticipates the Messiah: rejected at His first coming, received at His second.
The entire family moves to Egypt — 75 souls (not 70, as often quoted from the Hebrew Masoretic). Stephen follows the Septuagint count which includes ancestral households. The Bible is precise. Israel is preserved in a foreign land — an image of our age: the Lord has a Kingdom among the nations, not in Israel. That is where salvation is found.

Acts 7:16–22
16 And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem.

17 But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt,
18 Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph.
19 The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live.
20 In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months:
21 And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son.
22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.
This explains why Genesis is associated with Moses. Genesis is essentially inherited family records, passed down from Adam, then preserved through Israel into Egypt. Moses — educated, cultured, with access to the highest learning of Egypt — becomes their custodian. He likely added editorial clarifications. Thus Genesis becomes the first book of Moses.
Whenever Scripture quotes Genesis, it never says “as Moses wrote.” With Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, yes — but not Genesis. That is telling.
Israel multiplied in Egypt — as Exodus records. Then a new Pharaoh arose “who knew not Joseph”, and the old pattern returns: oppression, bondage, persecution. This is a picture of Israel’s bondage under the Law — also in the days of Christ — from which they needed deliverance.
Moses, the deliverer, is raised in the foreign royal house — as Joseph was. Christ also has His royal place outside Israel, in the heavenly realm. The typology is clear.

Acts 7:23–25
23 And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.
24 And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian.
25 For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not.
Forty signifies trial, testing, suffering — the struggle of earthly life. When the “forty” is complete, the time for deliverance arrives. Moses knew God would deliver Israel by his hand. Only Israel did not know it. He supposed they would recognise him. They did not. And so it is when Christ came: Israel did not recognise their Deliverer.

Acts 7:26–29
26 And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?
27 But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?
28 Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday?

29 Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons.
Moses becomes a stranger in Midian — a type of Christ rejected by the Jews. There he has two sons — representing the Church. The Church is often portrayed by two men — because of the twofold portion: Jew and Gentile.
Those two sons reflect Manasseh and Ephraim. Manasseh is a derivative of “Moshe” — linked to the Law, pointing to believing Jews. Ephraim represents believers from the nations. And they are reversed — the Gentiles come before the Jews. Israel is filled with jealousy again — “moved with envy” — just as the patriarchs.

Acts 7:30–34
30 And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush.
31 When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him,
32 Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold.
33 Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground.
34 I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.
When another period of forty years was fulfilled, God appeared to Moses — “in a flame of fire in a bush”. The forty again symbolises the suffering of earthly existence, and when that trial is complete, deliverance comes. All of Israel’s history follows these cycles — and so does the history of the Church. After forty years in Midian, the Deliverer is commissioned.
Moses sees a dry bush, burning with fire and yet not consumed. This is the nation of Israel — afflicted, judged, suffering — but not destroyed. God is not neutral; He says He has “seen… the affliction”, “heard their groaning”, and has “come down to deliver them”.
The deliverance will come through Moses, whom they had previously rejected. So it is with Christ: the One whom Israel rejected is the very One appointed for their deliverance.

Acts 7:35–36
35 This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush.
36 He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.
Stephen emphasises the very words Israel used: “Who made thee a ruler and a judge?” The Lord Himself made Moses ruler and deliverer. Those who reject God’s chosen instruments invariably find that God stands with the rejected one.

Israel did not believe at first, and faith in God’s work is essential. Moses only achieves deliverance after signs and wonders. Likewise, the Lord Jesus can only deliver Israel after His rejection, death, resurrection, ascension — and the sending of the Holy Spirit. Only afterwards is salvation offered.

Acts 7:37–38
37 This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.
38 This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:
Verse 37 refers to:
Deuteronomy 18:15
The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;
Moses is explicit: God will raise up a prophet like unto me — that is Christ. The Sanhedrin claims to be faithful to Moses, yet Moses points them directly to the Messiah. They claim to obey Moses while rejecting Him whom Moses foretold.
Verse 38 speaks of “the church in the wilderness”. The Greek word ekklesia means “assembly”. Israel was the assembly of the LORD at Sinai — not the Body of Christ, but still a congregation called out by God. The “lively oracles” are the living words of God — the Law — entrusted to Israel.

Acts 7:39–41
39 To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt,
40 Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.
41 And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.
Israel obeyed neither God nor Moses. Even after deliverance, when Moses ascended the mount, they turned back “in their hearts” to Egypt. Aaron then makes the golden calf.
Israel “rejoiced in the works of their own hands”. Religion created by the flesh is idolatry, even if it uses the name of God. The golden calf was introduced with the feast of Jehovah (Exodus 32): they imagined they could worship God in a way of their own design. That principle is at the core of religious Judaism and religious Christianity alike: human-made worship.

Acts 7:42–43
42 Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets,
O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by

the space of forty years in the wilderness?
43 Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.
This quotation is from Amos 5:25–27. Israel carried outwardly the Tabernacle of Jehovah, but inwardly the tabernacle of Moloch — the worship of Saturn, Remphan. God “gave them up”. He did not stop them; He abandoned them to their choices — just as He abandoned the nations in Romans 1. Divine judgement is often passive: God leaves people to themselves.
Stephen begins here to accuse the nation itself: idolatry, stubbornness, persistent rejection of the Word of God. He is not attacking Moses; he is defending Moses and accusing them.

Acts 7:44–46
44 Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen.
45 Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David;
46 Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.
“Jesus” in verse 45 refers to Joshua, whose Hebrew name is identical to “Yeshua” — meaning “Jehovah is salvation”. The first one to bring Israel into inheritance bore the same name as the Messiah who will one day bring Israel into the Kingdom.
David desired to build a house for God — a permanent dwelling.

Acts 7:47–50
47 But Solomon built him an house.
48 Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet,
49 Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?
50 Hath not my hand made all these things?
Solomon built the temple, but Stephen quotes Isaiah 66 to show that God does not dwell in temples made with hands. God cannot be contained. Israel confused symbol with substance. That same error is seen in Christianity: faith in buildings, institutions, liturgies — all human works — not faith in the living Christ.

Acts 7:51–53
51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.
52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

53 Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.
Stephen’s tone changes sharply. He now speaks as the prophets spoke: Israel is stiff-necked. They resist the Holy Spirit — continuously. Every prophet who foretold the Messiah was persecuted. And when the Just One Himself came, instead of receiving Him, they murdered Him.
They “received the law by the disposition of angels” — the Law was mediated (Deuteronomy 33:2, Galatians 3:19). They boast of having the Law, but they did not keep it.

Acts 7:54–60
54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.
55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,
56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.
57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,
58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.
59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.
60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.
They are “cut to the heart” — enraged — and gnash their teeth like wild beasts. They stone him — the official Jewish method of execution for blasphemy. Stephen sees Jesus standing — not seated — at the right hand of God. The Messiah is ready to act. Had Israel repented nationally, the Kingdom would have come.
But they kill Stephen, rejecting the final testimony of the Holy Spirit. The stoning of Stephen is the turning point of the early chapters of Acts. The earthly offer of the Messianic Kingdom is withdrawn. Christ remains in heaven. The next stage begins: the calling of the Gentiles through Paul. And here Saul appears — the future apostle. He is the execution witness; the murder of Stephen is partly entrusted to him. Stephen prays for his murderers, as Jesus did. He “fell asleep” — the biblical expression for the death of a believer: rest, awaiting resurrection.

Acts 8 — Verses 1–4
1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.
2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.
3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

Saul, because he “was consenting unto his death”, is commonly considered to have been a member of the Sanhedrin. This is not proven with complete certainty, yet tradition teaches it so. The apostles remained in Jerusalem, but many believers were scattered into the regions of Judea and Samaria. The great persecution resulted in the dispersal of the believers. Whether they wished it or not, they became missionaries, for they carried the Gospel with them — from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria.

In the first chapter of Acts it had already been proclaimed: “Ye shall be witnesses unto me… in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria.” This is now being fulfilled here in chapter 8. It did not occur because they consciously carried out a missionary command. They simply did it. The statement in Acts 1 was not a command, though many read it as, “you must be my witnesses.” “Ye shall” is then taken as an imperative — that is law. But “ye shall” may also carry a prophetic meaning: a declaration of fact, that this is what will certainly happen. That is the case here. They became His witnesses.

Here, the Gospel moves from Jerusalem to Samaria. In reality, it goes from the Jews to the Ten Tribes of Israel.

Saul devastated the Church, “entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison” — something to which he would often refer later in his epistles. Persecution, rejection of the Gospel — that is, of Christ Himself, and of Christians — takes place in Jerusalem. But the scattered believers “preached the word”, in accordance with the earlier declaration: “Ye shall be witnesses unto me.”

Among these scattered ones was not one of the apostles, the twelve, but one of the deacons: Philip. Stephen and Philip are the only two of the seven from chapter 6 about whom we hear more later on.

Philip went to Samaria and “preached Christ unto them”, the Messiah. First in Samaria, the former capital of the Ten-Tribe kingdom and official centre of Samaritan religion. Later we find him at Caesarea. Philip remained living in Caesarea, though he seems to have travelled extensively. Little more is stated about him in Scripture, but outside it many stories are known. We encounter him in early Church history. In all probability, he eventually came to southern France. In Gaul he served as a kind of coordinator for all missionary work taking place there. Scripture does not mention this further, but it does give us the route he followed: Jerusalem, Samaria, Caesarea, and from there naturally to the true Samaritans — to the Ten Tribes.

Later, when Paul is on his final journey to Jerusalem, he again passes through Caesarea and meets Philip once more (Acts 21:8).

From this harbour city (see Acts 10), the Gospel went by sea to the Gentiles. In Caesarea also took place the story of the centurion Cornelius. He was officially the first Gentile to come to faith, and who demonstratively and openly received the Holy Ghost. From Caesarea the Gospel officially went forth to the Gentiles.

Acts 8:5–8
5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.
6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.
7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.
8 And there was great joy in that city.
Philip proclaimed to them that Jesus is the Christ. Everything ultimately leads to that point. They both saw and heard the signs he performed. Thus the preaching in Samaria occurred in the same manner as originally in Jerusalem — the proclamation of the Gospel accompanied by signs and wonders. Of the same character too, as verse 7 describes: demons, evil spirits, were expelled openly. Hence “crying with loud voice”, for otherwise one would not even know it had occurred.
In our present age we need not know such things. Demonstration does not belong to our dispensation as such. God does not now demonstrate His work — He did that in the past, particularly in contexts such as these. On the other hand, these signs themselves picture the work that the Lord Jesus Christ accomplishes. Entire nations have been delivered from the power of the evil one. Where Satan and his servants have been overcome and the Gospel has taken root.
When it says, “many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed”, it forms a picture of the Ten Tribes of Israel, as discussed earlier in Acts 3. History repeats itself. That people is healed. So here also. For them these signs served as a confirmation of the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. Where Christ is, there is joy — it can hardly be otherwise. When the glad tidings are proclaimed and accepted, it must logically lead to great joy. “I bring you good tidings of great joy.” (Luke 2:10) This was said at the birth of the Lord Jesus, yet it was in advance a statement concerning His resurrection and the definitive arrival of the New Covenant. And here this great joy came to Samaria.

Acts 8:9–11

9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one:
10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.
11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.
True sorcery involves demons, yet where the Holy Spirit dwells, they have little opportunity. The best course for a Christian is simply to ignore them, for we stand above them. The Power within us is stronger than those powers.
Simon — whose name means “hearing” — heard voices, I suspect. If he practised sorcery, the likelihood is very high. Then he becomes an oracle:

a channel for many spirits. He was in the city before Philip arrived. He “bewitched the people”—their senses were enchanted. Their perceptions were deceived. Their sound judgement no longer functioned properly. The senses themselves may be “bewitched”, so that, as a result, one becomes beside oneself, unable to hear what is said, unable to see what is plainly before one, even when standing in the midst of it.
Some think that this sorcery was actually sleight-of-hand. The two lie close together; there is no clear boundary between them. It is always a “bewitching of the senses”. He bewitched their senses so that the people lost sight of reality. This also happened in Galatia (chapter 3), when the Law was preached to them. Paul says, “Who hath bewitched you, O foolish Galatians?” There we are dealing with demonic influences. It is a sharp statement, I know, but Scripture gives ample foundation for it elsewhere. Even through the Law one may lose sight of reality. That is precisely what demons do: closing people off from reality — from the Truth — for in the end it comes down to that. Thus they are called “unclean spirits”, or “evil spirits”, or “lying spirits”.
The devil was the first to discover that he was “some great one”, greater than he actually was. Delusions of grandeur belong to man who overestimates himself. Simon exalted himself above the people and made himself their leader. “They all gave heed to him, from the least to the greatest, saying: This man is the great power of God.” He was assuredly not, but the result was that “they that had regard to him” became bound to this Simon the Sorcerer, as he became known. But then Philip arrived.

Acts 8:12–13
12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.
13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.
“The Gospel of the Kingdom of God” and “the Name of Jesus Christ” are entirely identical. There is no Kingdom without Jesus Christ, for He is the King of the Kingdom of God. This Philip proclaimed. They came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and were baptized — I take this to be simply in water, for this practice accompanied the preaching of the Gospel, as becomes evident later in this chapter when Philip baptises the Ethiopian eunuch.
They came to faith in the simple biblical message. These people were apparently not hindered by demonic influences. I do not claim that such hindrance never exists, but I wish to say that such satanic powers in practice must always yield to the Lord Jesus Christ. Whoever consciously seeks the Truth is confronted with the Lord Jesus — and then there is no place for such powers. Demons flee before the Name of Jesus. That Name is higher than demons. Even unbelievers know this. We should know it as well, and take no notice of them, knowing where we stand — faithful to the Lord and not guided by various ideas or interesting tales, but by the Word of God.

Simon is an example of this, for he himself believed. The powers of God surpassed those other powers. This is always the case.

Acts 8:14–16
14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:
15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:
16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)
Peter and John were sent to Samaria as representatives of the twelve. These are the only apostles named as active prior to Paul's appearance. First the Gospel arrived in Samaria — only later did the apostles come. This corresponds, as far as I know, with the situation of the true Ten Tribes of Israel: there also the Gospel came first, and only later the apostles. Scripture no longer narrates this. Peter is strongly suspected of having been in London. A church is dedicated to him: Saint Peter upon Cornhill. Another is dedicated to the apostle Paul: Saint Paul's. Some of the other apostles also appear to have been there — Simon the Zealot, for instance.
In verse 15 we encounter a difficult expression. How so had they not received the Holy Ghost? That is the logical question. Verse 16 explains: "For as yet he was fallen upon none of them." This "fallen upon" is the expression previously used: "the Holy Ghost shall come upon you." It signifies an outward working of the Spirit. That had not yet occurred. One cannot see from the outside whether a person has received the Holy Spirit. When, on the Day of Pentecost, matters were disputed, the Holy Spirit acted in such a way that He manifested Himself. That is not normal, otherwise the Spirit would no longer be called Spirit, for spirit is by definition unseen. He manifested Himself in such a way that all could clearly recognise this as the working of the Holy Spirit — that He had been poured out. That is what had not happened here — and that is not the normal state. We are not yet here in the ordinary situation; that arrives only beyond the history recorded in Acts. Here we are still in the earliest days of our dispensation, a time of great upheaval. This had to be demonstrated. It was done demonstratively at Pentecost.
Here we are for the first time outside Jerusalem and officially no longer among Jews, but among Samaritans. Therefore it was desirable that this development be divinely confirmed.
The expression "baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (v.16) can refer to baptism with water, and likely does. But when such expressions appear in places such as Romans 6: "we are baptized into Christ, into His death," we do not think of water at all. When the Holy Spirit is the subject, and baptism is mentioned, one should not immediately think of water either. When one receives the Spirit, one is "by one Spirit… baptized into one body" (1 Corinthians 12:13). That is baptism in, with, or by the Holy Spirit. Here the question is: have they received the Holy Spirit? Then it says: "they were only baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." The point concerns the visible manifestation — that of the Spirit. "Fallen" means "descending with power". That power manifests itself here.

Acts 8:39–40
39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.
40 But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.
In this account the Gospel is preached to someone who, by origin, has nothing to do with Israel — neither with the Two Tribes, nor with the Ten Tribes. He is simply a Gentile. And what sort of Gentile? A son of Ham. According to biblical standards, that was considered the most despised and "ignoble" line, humanly speaking. Harsh though it sounds, that is how it is presented. And yet he hears the Gospel and comes to faith.
It is surely no coincidence that this man obtained that scroll of Isaiah. I think he was seeking the truth, and perhaps that is why he had gone up to Jerusalem — in the hope of finding it there.
Generally speaking, people do not come to faith merely by reading the Bible, but by the preaching of the Word. Keep that in mind. You need more than just a Bible. The Word is to be proclaimed. As it says in Romans 10:15:
"And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"
That verse quotes Isaiah 52:7:
"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!"
The Word must sound forth. Of course, preaching is based on Scripture and must be tested against Scripture, but above all it is to be proclaimed aloud. That is exactly what happens here.
Philip is sent to this man, who clearly rejoices in the Gospel, and then takes it back with him to his homeland, to Ethiopia. From there it undoubtedly spread further. That is simply how the spread of the Gospel works. At that time not yet in a systematic way, but it nevertheless happened. Later the Gospel would indeed be preached systematically, including throughout Africa. Scripture does not record all this, but we know from other sources that a number of the apostles, including some of the Twelve, preached the Gospel in Mauretania — that is, the whole north coast of Africa. From there it must have moved further south.
The Bible does not describe all that, but it does indicate the direction the movement takes. Finally, the Gospel has gone out into all the world. As Paul says in Romans 10:18:
"But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world."
The eunuch does not look back for Philip, who suddenly is gone, but "went on his way rejoicing".
Philip, meanwhile, was briefly "missing" and was then found at Azotus — another city of the former Philistines. "Azotus" is the Greek form of Ashdod. Philip was taken away by "the Spirit of the Lord." He was involved

in this. The remarkable thing is that now the apostles play no role at all in this scene. The work simply continues and is confirmed by God Himself. “Philip was found at Azotus” is not a normal way of speaking. It clearly links back to verse 39. At Gaza he was apparently no longer there — the Spirit took him away — and afterwards “he was found” in Azotus. How he travelled from Gaza to Azotus, he probably did not even know himself. That is the delightful element in this story. The point is simply: he **was** there. He was led by the Spirit. And that Spirit is the Lord Himself — the same “angel” of verse 26, but in essence it is one and the same, if you ask me.

From Ashdod Philip went on preaching the Gospel. He proclaimed the Gospel in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea. He did not stop there, but settled in that city by the sea and worked from there. Traces of his ministry are later found around the whole Mediterranean. Certainly in Gaul (present-day France), and in my opinion also on Crete.

In these chapters we are shown how the Gospel is preached from Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, including “the uttermost part of the earth.” It is the rounding off of the story so far. It will continue in chapter 10 with the conversion of the Gentile Cornelius, who lived in Caesarea. Peter went there, because he is officially the man appointed to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. By this point we hear nothing more about John. The narrative narrows more and more.

In the next chapter Paul is introduced. Not primarily because he will bring the Gospel to the Gentiles (though he indeed does that), but because with him things go in the opposite direction: Saul, by birth a Gentile with Roman citizenship, preaches the Gospel everywhere to the Jews, and is thus the man who does it the other way around. That is ultimately the situation in our present dispensation. That is where Acts is heading.

Acts 9:1–3

1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,

2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven.

Through the name Damascus we are led back to its first mention in Scripture — in Genesis 15, when the Lord repeats His promises to Abram: “And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?” (Genesis 15:2) Already in the Old Testament Damascus points, in a typological way, to truth about the Church, because salvation goes there. Damascus was and is the capital of Syria, which in Old Testament history is associated with the Ten Tribes of Israel. Because of that typological link with the Ten Tribes in exile, we find Paul “breathing out threatenings and slaughter” in Damascus — officially foreign territory.

There “a light from heaven” suddenly shines around him. He is blinded and for a few days can see nothing, because he has looked into the light

that was too strong for him. That is called blindness. One is not blind because of darkness, but because of too much light.
In general, this points to the greater glory of the New Covenant. As set out in 2 Corinthians 3: there we read that the Old Covenant was indeed glory and light, but in comparison with the light of the New Covenant that light is as darkness. This kind of blinding appears a few times in the Old Testament and always points to the dawning of the New Covenant, which gives so much light that many, at least at first, are blinded by it. One must become accustomed to the light, adjust to it. Many are unwilling to do so and prefer the darkness of the Law and of the Old Covenant to the light, the freedom, the insight and perspective of the New. They cannot bear the light and remain in the small, narrow world in which they are used to living.

Acts 9:4–5
4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?
5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.
Saul persecuted the Church — the Body of Christ. The Lord takes this personally and says: “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” Saul is always the one who persecutes the Lord, the Son of David — David himself, as it were.
It is no coincidence that the name Saul appears twice. Saul was king over Israel before the days of David, before the establishment of the Davidic dynasty. The institution of David’s house is a picture of the New Covenant. It points to the Son of David, to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the rule that preceded Christ — the rule of the Law. Saul is a picture of that.
Saul is chosen by God. His name means “asked (for), chosen, requested” — “given by God”. Yet at the same time he is the one chosen by the people. The people choose the Law. That is what they want. But that rule ends in an anticlimax. It begins well and ends badly — with Saul’s death, in his own suicide. That is a picture of what happens with the Law. The Law brings its own rule to an end. The Law condemns all who live under it to death. Once they are dead, they are no longer under the Law. Thus the Law itself brings its own rule to an end (see Galatians 2).
That Paul did not know the Lord was obvious. That he knew the Name of the Lord, certainly. And he thought he was serving the Lord. In reality he was not, and therefore he immediately concludes, “I evidently do not know Him,” and asks: “Who art thou, Lord?”
There is discussion whether this word “Lord” corresponds to the Hebrew Adonai or to Jehovah, the divine Name. Both are translated into English as “Lords”, and into Greek as Kyrios — “Lord”. I think that Paul has Jehovah in mind, especially because the question suggests it. In the Old Testament, when someone asks “Who art thou, Lord?” or “What is Thy Name?”, the answer is always Jehovah
The Lord answered Paul: “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.” This is the exact reverse of Acts 2, where Peter says:

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” (Acts 2:36)
Jesus is Jehovah, and Jehovah is Jesus. Since the resurrection, both can be described as the image of God: “the express image of his person.” Saul had a false image of who the Lord is. That is also the problem in Judaism today: they do not know Him, which is illustrated by the systematic refusal to use the Name of the Lord. They do not wish to know Him. We, however, ought to learn to know the Lord and thus conclude that Jehovah and Jesus are the same.
The phrase “it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” may possibly be missing here in certain manuscripts, but in Acts 22, where Paul again reports the event, it is certainly present. It refers to an animal kicking backwards against goads. It means: you would do better not to resist. The “pricks” (goads) were fixed to the plough or cart so that when the animal kicked back it hurt itself. For Paul there was very little room to protest — the Lord grasped him here.

Acts 9:6–9

6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.
7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.
8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.
9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.
Saul is trembling and amazed, and asks: “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” The Lord sends him into the city, where he will be told further what he is to do.
His travelling companions stand speechless — they hear the voice, but see no one. Saul rises from the earth, opens his eyes, and yet sees no one. They must lead him by the hand into Damascus.
He is three days without sight, and does not eat or drink. This clearly pictures death. The theme is new birth, and thus resurrection out of death. After three days — or “on the third day” — healing comes, there is resurrection. The eyes of Saul are opened.
(There is later in your text a repeated paragraph about Saul as a picture of the rule of the Law, ending in death; the meaning is the same as above, so I will not duplicate it word for word again.)

Acts 9:12–18
12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.
13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:
14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:
16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.
17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.
18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.
Ananias is not exactly enthusiastic about Saul recovering his sight. The Lord tells him that Saul “hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias” coming in and laying his hands on him so that he might see again. Ananias protests: he has heard from many how much harm this man has done to the saints at Jerusalem, and that he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on the Lord’s Name.
But the Lord says: “Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.” A vessel is perhaps the tool most frequently used by man. It is used to prepare and carry food; a vessel must be filled with something, just as a tool must be used for something. In this case: “to bear my name before the Gentiles.”
That is exactly what Paul does straightaway in principle. Later, he also appears before kings. At the end of his missionary journeys, as far as Scripture records them, he returns to Jerusalem, is arrested there, and subsequently appears before Felix and Festus. After that he appears before King Agrippa, king of the Jews. Finally, he stands before the emperor. One cannot go higher than that. So: first before the Gentiles, then before kings.
Saul had previously persecuted Jesus, but from now on he will be persecuted **with** Jesus — that is already announced here by the Lord: “For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.”
All this is spoken to Ananias, who is to go to Saul. Saul himself has also had a vision. Ananias goes, enters the house of Judas “in the street which is called Straight”, lays hands on him and says: “Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me…” What is expressed here is the dawning of the New Covenant. Light would arise — or Life. Here called the Holy Ghost. Incorruptibility is brought to light.
In fact, not much more “happens” than that Ananias simply says this to him. Immediately “there fell from his eyes as it had been scales”, and Saul receives his sight at once, stands up and is baptized.

“Arise” is what the Lord always says — not only here. “Arise, and come forth!” Or: “Arise, take up thy bed.” It always begins with **resurrection**. Even with the man with the withered hand the Lord says: “Stand forth” (Luke 6:8). It is the same principle.

Paul must be told in Damascus how the story continues. He was near that city, but had to be led into it. For three days he saw nothing and during that time he neither ate nor drank — again a picture of death. On the third day his eyes are opened and he rises and is baptized: a picture of resurrection and new life.
The theme is once again resurrection. Not that Paul is literally born again at this very moment, but it is an illustration of Christ's resurrection and of what that resurrection has brought about. Saul experiences this in his own body.

Acts 9:19–20
19 And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.
20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.
"Synagogue" is a Greek word that has been left untranslated. If it had been translated, it would simply read "assemblies" or "gatherings".
What then did he preach? Christ, from the Old Testament, from the prophetic word — the Messiah. He preached that the Messiah is not only the Son of David, but that He is also the Son of God. Notice that here he does not yet use the Name "Jesus"; he holds that back for the moment. You can show from the Old Testament alone, without yet naming the Lord Jesus, that the Messiah must be the Son of God. The Messiah is not only Son of David, but also Son of God.
In the promise where that Son of David is foretold, the Lord says:
"I will be his father, and he shall be my son." (2 Samuel 7:14)
In that order. The Jews insist that God has no Son, which simply shows they are not truly reading their own Scriptures. These are among the most essential prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah. Paul refers them to the Lord Jesus as the fulfilment of precisely these prophecies.

Acts 9:21–23
21 But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?
22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.
23 And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him.
What about those "many days"? This points to a middle period. Saul left Damascus and only returned there after "many days", as we learn from Galatians 1, where Paul explains what happened immediately after his conversion — long before his later public ministry began.
He says that he "immediately" did not confer with flesh and blood. What did he do instead?
"I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus." (Galatians 1:17)
So Paul's stay in Damascus was interrupted by a trip to Arabia — to Mount Sinai, in what we now call Saudi Arabia. There he went, we might say, to "consult the Spirit", of whom he writes:

“Now the Lord is that Spirit…” (2 Corinthians 3:17)
In 2 Corinthians he reports this: that he did not consult with flesh and blood, but with the Spirit. Under the motto: “If I have not understood the Old Testament, if I do not understand the Law, then I will go back to the source.”
Where did Moses receive the Law? At Sinai, a mountain in Arabia. There the Lord had shown Moses certain things. Later, apparently, He showed Elijah the same — Scripture does not say exactly what Elijah saw there, but I think it was the same. I have good reason to believe that the Lord Jesus was there also, in exactly the same way — in heavenly vision.
In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul says:
“I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.” (2 Corinthians 12:2)
That is the heaven of heavens. There he heard “unspeakable words” that it was not lawful for a man to utter — at least, not to the Corinthians, for they were only interested in the here and now. From both Corinthian letters it is clear that the Lord had indeed charged him with this message, but the Corinthians did not want to listen.
The Spirit had led him into all truth, so that he could later say: “God is my witness, I lie not.” That is how it happened. “I did not receive this from man.” It comes from the Scriptures, which I have been taught to understand because the Lord opened my eyes.
Paul did what he had to do: he sought counsel from the Lord, and afterwards tried to join the disciples. There he was not exactly welcome, and so he went home — back to Damascus. He redid his “homework” there, and then, “after many days were fulfilled”, he appeared again on the scene, taught by the Spirit. But then “the Jews took counsel to kill him.”

Acts 9:24–25
24 But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.
25 Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.
Judaism has always been divided. That was so in the days of Saul and of the Lord Jesus. But when it comes to hostility against the Lord Jesus Christ, and thus against the Gospel, they are usually united.
The ambush, set up so that he could not get out of the city, became known to Saul. In a basket, through a window, he could escape the danger — they even wanted to kill him. Paul refers to this in 2 Corinthians 11. There he mentions that the Nabataeans were also after him. The apostle had probably told them one or two things on his way back, so that he also incurred the hatred of the Nabataeans.
King Aretas was evidently the supreme authority in Damascus. He was king of an Ishmaelite people. The Nabataeans descended from Nebajoth, a grandson of Ishmael. Their centre was Petra, once the great capital of Edom. So you have all three together: the Jewish people (Judaism), Edom,

and Ishmael. All three are after Saul. And I think that is how it has always remained, in principle.
Saul had to flee in a rather dishonourable way, so to speak. That continues in Acts 9 and, to a certain extent, throughout the rest of his ministry, as we shall see later. Wherever he goes, he always seeks out the Jews first, and they are generally hostile, with exceptions here and there.

Acts 9:26–27
26 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.
27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.
When Saul came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they did not trust him; they were all afraid of him and did not believe that he was truly a disciple. So he was not really received in Jerusalem — not by the believers there (they did not trust him), and certainly not by the Jews, who would have regarded him as a traitor.
This is bound up with a key feature of Paul's ministry: he does not have to give account to organisations or men. That makes him independent. Saul, a Jew by birth — both ethnically and religiously — ends up functioning in his ministry as a Roman citizen. That he is from birth, being born in Tarsus.
By ship he eventually goes home, to Tarsus. It means, in a sense, that he will start his career over again. Back home and start afresh. He goes back via Caesarea, which had already been introduced earlier in Acts.
Everything to do with the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles goes via Caesarea. From Jerusalem to Caesarea is: from the Jews to the Gentiles. It is a picture of how things go in our dispensation, where salvation as such is sent exclusively to the Gentiles and is taken away from the Jews.
He is that Gentile who, from among the Gentiles, preaches the Gospel to the Jews. He comes in from a completely different direction. There is a clear separation from his Jewish background. He does not really form ties with the believers from among the Jews, especially not in Jerusalem. In his ministry he is not "a Jew" as such, but stands as a Gentile. He preaches precisely to the Jews as "apostle of the Gentiles", or "preacher among the Gentiles". These expressions mean that he sees himself as belonging, positionally, to the nations.
Later in the chapter (v.29,) it should really say: "against the Grecians." "The Greek Jews" is probably the right idea: Jews in the synagogue who used the Greek language. They were somewhat more "liberal" and did not cling to orthodox Hebrew. They also tried to kill him. The orthodox Jews in Damascus had tried it; now the more liberal, Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem are trying the same.
He is then brought away, and the brothers probably gave him an escort as far as Caesarea and from there on to Tarsus.
"Tarsus" is the same name as "Tarshish". They are different places, but share the same name. Tarshish is not Paul's hometown, but "the ships of

Tarshish” are sought somewhere off the west coast of Spain, on the Atlantic seaboard. Originally the name Tarshish was given to Carthage, on the south coast of the Mediterranean. Later the name is given to a British seaport.
So the route of the Gospel becomes: from Canaan via Caesarea, with a “ship of Tarshish”, via Carthage, then out of the Mediterranean, along Iberia (named after Eber), to Britain — to “the isles of the west”, as Isaiah says repeatedly.
In Jerusalem Saul did not gain a foothold — not among the believers there, who did not trust him, and not among the Jews, who considered him a renegade. The result was:
“Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified…” (Acts 9:31)
They “had peace and were edified” — “edified” means “built up”. If people want peace, they must first have peace with God. Then comes the building up — in this case of local assemblies. The Church (the Body of Christ) can only be built up as the individual members are built up. That is only possible if they have peace:
“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1)
After that comes spiritual growth. Some try to build local churches in order to get peace — with God, with themselves, and perhaps with one another. That will not work. It is the wrong way round. Here we see that as a result of that peace, “they were multiplied.” They spread out and increased.

Acts 9:32–35
32 And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.
33 And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy.
34 And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.
35 And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.
“Lydda”, which is now again called “Lod”, belonged to the territory of Benjamin. It lies about 15 km south-east of Tel Aviv and Jaffa, on the border between the Two Tribes and the Ten Tribes. Benjamin was the small tribe that was added to Judah when the kingdom split.
He was first called “Ben-oni” — “son of my sorrow”, as Rachel said. Officially it is very oddly translated as “son of my old age” or “son of my later days”, but “son of my sorrow” is the straightforward meaning. Benjamin, the only full brother of Joseph and the youngest, is a picture of the believing remnant from Israel — just like Saul from the tribe of Benjamin.
In 1 Kings 11:36 it is foretold that this small tribe of Benjamin will serve as a lamp for Judah:
“And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light alway before me in Jerusalem…” (1 Kings 11:36)
Benjamin is thus, from God’s side, the light-source for Judah. That means Benjamin is at least a type of the believing remnant among the Jews.

For the concrete fulfilment you end up here in Acts 9, with Paul, from the tribe of Benjamin, as light among the Jews.
We are on that “border” in this story — at the transition from the Jews to the Gentiles. There were already believers in Lydda before Peter arrived. Aeneas — his name means “to the praise of God” or “praiseworthy” — has lain ill eight years and is healed. The “eight years” suggest that he has passed beyond the “seven” — the sabbath — to the next day: beyond the Old Covenant into the New.
It appears that this man is a picture of the Jewish people. After “the seven” (after the sabbath, the Old Covenant), comes the new day, the New Covenant. “Saron” is from “Sharon”, as in “the rose of Sharon” — that plain bears the name. Many come to faith in connection with the healing of Aeneas.

Acts 9:36–38
36 Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.
37 And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.
38 And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.
At Joppa there is a certain female disciple, named Tabitha, which translated is Dorcas. Dorcas means “gazelle” or “hind” — a deer. In the Psalms the deer is a picture of the believing remnant of Israel.
She “was full of good works and alms deeds which she did” — that indicates she was a believer. Without faith there are no “good works”, at least not according to God’s standard. “Good works and alms” line up with what the Lord expects of man, which is why they are often mentioned in the New Testament.
The first reference is in Matthew 5, where the Lord says:
“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)
Good works are works to the glory of God. The last reference is in 1 Peter 2:12:
“Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.” (1 Peter 2:12)
Exactly the same idea. From the intervening passages it is clear that good works spring from a believing heart — in contrast to evil works, works of unrighteousness, works of darkness, which spring from an evil heart.
“When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper chamber” is mentioned because Scripture teaches that the one who has died is justified from sin. After that, the question is of resurrection — and it is precisely that which cleanses a person. Through death and resurrection — through new birth.

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” (Titus 3:5)

In Acts 1 and 2 we were already in an upper room. Now we are again in an upper room. It is a different one, but it continues to portray the heavenly position of the Church. In the upper room things are made alive.

In 2 Kings 4, the son of the Shunammite woman is raised in the upper room. In Mark 5 and Luke 8, the daughter of Jairus is raised — also in the upper room. Likewise in 1 Kings 17, with Elijah and the widow of Zarephath: the child is revived in the upper room.

Later, in Acts 20, we have another upper room at Troas, where a young man falls from the window; again, he is raised. Three times the raising of a man, and once of a woman — and in each case the person is raised from the dead in the upper room, usually with no one else present.

The point is that the upper room is the picture of the formation of the Church — in the heavenlies. In the upper room the Lord was with His disciples when He gave them bread and wine and said: “This is my blood of the new testament.” In the upper room people receive life. A few days later, on the Sunday after His resurrection, the Lord appears again in the upper room to His disciples.

The Lord is doing a hidden work in our days: the formation of the Church. The upper room, again and again, points us to that heavenly, hidden work of life and resurrection.

And the “two men” they send to Peter? We often meet two men in Scripture. Sometimes they are Moses and Elijah; sometimes the one is Andrew and the other is unnamed; sometimes one is Cleopas and the other’s name is not given. This happens often, because “two men” stand for the double portion, which belongs to the firstborn. They are a picture of the Church. Hence usually only one name is mentioned — they represent something corporate.

Acts 9:39–43

39 And Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.

40 But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

41 And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.

42 And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.

43 And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.

Historically, the resurrection described here is an isolated event, though things of this kind happen several times in Scripture. But the real point is the typological meaning. These are hidden things, which is itself a picture of our present dispensation.

That is why I am inclined to see Dorcas as a picture of the Ten Tribes of Israel — as it were, brought back to life — and from them the Church emerges, via Peter. We find here the same result as in verse 35 after the healing of Aeneas: the miracle leads to many believing in the Lord.

Acts 10

Over this chapter stands the heading “Cornelius the centurion”. It is the extended account of Peter, who must go to the Gentile Cornelius to preach the Gospel to him, with the result that Cornelius and all his household are converted in Caesarea.

The story is in four parts:

1. Verses 1–8 – the preparation of Cornelius.
2. Verses 9–16 – the preparation of Peter.
3. Verses 17–33 – Peter with Cornelius (Peter must go to Cornelius, not the other way round).
4. Verses 34–43 – Peter’s preaching in the house of Cornelius, the actual message.

The outcome is in verses 44–48, where we read of what is commonly called “the outpouring of the Holy Ghost”.

Acts 10:1

1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,

In those days “Cornelius” was a very common Roman name. Cornelius here stands as a representative of the Gentile in general, regardless of specific identity. He represents the truth that salvation would go to the Gentiles, and that the glory of the Lord, salvation, the Gospel, would take root among them. That is what these chapters are about. Sometimes literally at the surface level, but far more often in the background.

In this book of Acts, it is always about the same thing: salvation goes to the Gentiles — in the sense that salvation is transferred, relocated. And in this chapter we reach that point.

Cornelius simply stayed at home. The Gentiles remained where they were — and among them salvation was planted.

Acts 10:2–6

2 A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.

3 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.

4 And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.

5 And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter:

6 He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.

Cornelius was well-disposed towards the Jews. At “the ninth hour”, in Scripture, it always becomes light. From “the sixth to the ninth hour” there

was darkness over all the land at the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 27:45). Three o'clock in the afternoon — by then it must be light again.
Here it is a vision ("in a vision"), given through the angel of God, that is, the Lord Himself. The sincerity of Cornelius and his willingness to seek honestly is rewarded by God. So it was with the apostle Paul, and so it still is in our day.
Joppa is also a harbour city. Jonah the prophet sailed from there towards Nineveh, where he had to preach God's message to the Gentiles. "Nineveh" is, in Hebrew sound, "nin-niveh" — "double son" or "two sons" — and thus is a picture of the Ten Tribes with the birthright.
Jonah actually did not want to preach the Gospel in Nineveh, but it happened anyway, via a shipwreck. He preached judgement upon Nineveh, but it did not fall, because Nineveh repented. That is the same story here in Acts: the Gospel went to the Gentiles, especially to the Ten Tribes. The Jews actually did not want that, but "via a shipwreck" it happened all the same.
Although, normally, judgement should have come — and indeed judgement is preached over the whole world, over all mankind — that God has given up the nations and turned out the light in the world; yet precisely there, in the north-west, the light rose. This is announced prophetically several times in the Old Testament — that it would be so. Judgement should have come, but it did not, because people repented. That is the sign given to the Jewish people when they asked for a sign (Matthew 16:4).
The death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus on the third day were a repetition of that sign. After that, the Gospel went to Nineveh — to the "double son", the Ten Tribes, who disappeared into the Assyrian Empire, of which Nineveh was the capital.
Simon Peter is "lodged" at the house of Simon the tanner. They are both called Simon, and therefore they "belong together" in a typological sense. Making tents is an image of the preaching of the Gospel in our days: first a temporary dwelling, then a permanent one. Working leather is a picture of new birth: making something new (something better) out of something old.

Acts 10:7–13
7 And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually;
8 And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.
9 On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour:
10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,
11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:

12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.
13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.
Simon Peter goes up on the roof to pray. Strictly speaking it is not an upper room, but it comes close, for an upper room is in fact a room on the roof. Around “the sixth hour” the light normally goes out. So it was on the day of the crucifixion. Around the ninth hour it came back on.
Previously we were with a Gentile, Cornelius, and at the ninth hour it becomes light. Now we are with a Jew, Peter, and at the sixth hour it becomes dark. That is the situation in the world: among the Jews the light went out, and among the Gentiles — at least some of them — the light went on.
Downstairs they are preparing a meal. Simon Peter experiences a kind of “distortion of the senses” — a trance, we might say. When people do not see ordinary things, they see “heaven opened” — we know that expression also from Stephen. A large linen sheet can hold a great deal. It is let down from heaven, containing all sorts of unclean creatures one may not eat. But it is precisely about eating here. A voice from heaven says: “Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.”
This expresses that through resurrection (“Rise”) the New Covenant begins. Under the New Covenant all those regulations of the Old Covenant — including the food laws — no longer apply. Peter must learn here about matters relating to the lifestyle of believers, which will be discussed later in Acts 15. The point is that under the New Covenant one no longer lives under these ordinances.
It is not merely about the food laws; the whole Jewish culture is in view. Peter is confronted with the fact that he no longer lives under it. Something is set before him which no Jew would touch, and yet he is told: “Rise, kill, and eat.” Peter is being invited to make a clear break with his Jewish background and religion. Only in that way could he become a vessel (a tool) that the Lord can use.

Acts 10:14–20
14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.
15 And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.
16 This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.
17 Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate,
18 And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.
19 While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.
20 Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.

If something is “common v.15” then it is not kosher — the Jews know that to this day. Then it is unclean. But the Lord says: “If it is cleansed, you must not declare it unclean, Peter.” If anyone has the right to declare something clean, it is God Himself.
We read the same later (Romans 14; 1 Timothy 4; Titus 1), where it is written that everything is clean and useful, “if it be received with thanksgiving”. Paul writes: “unto the pure all things are pure.” If you yourself have been cleansed, then everything is clean to you. “Every creature of God is good” and “nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving.”
“That this was done thrice” is nothing unusual where Peter is concerned (cf. Matthew 26:34). “Three times” stands for God’s promises fulfilled on the third day, the day of resurrection. Three means promise in the sense of “three is final” — threefold confirmation. “Three times is ship’s right”, as we say. “A threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12). “In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established” (2 Corinthians 13:1).
In verse 19 it is three men who seek him. Peter is brought down from the roof and must deal with them.

Acts 10:21–30
21 Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?
22 And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.
23 Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.
24 And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.
25 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.
26 But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.
27 And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together.
28 And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.
29 Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?
30 And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house…
“Warned from God by an holy angel” (v.22) is very similar to what is said about Joseph, that he was “warned of God in a dream” to dwell in Nazareth and not in Bethlehem (Matthew 2). Not in Judea, but in Galilee. It pictures the same thing: that salvation went to the Gentiles.

Thanks to the vision shown him, Peter now knows that he is loosed (“ontbonden”): he is not bound any longer by the Jewish laws in this respect. Therefore he comes “without gainsaying” — without contradiction. That, for Peter, is quite remarkable; you would hardly recognise the man.
Cornelius has been fasting for four days “until this hour”, and at the ninth hour he was praying in his house when the angel appeared — and now Peter arrives at that very time.

Acts 10:31–36
31 And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.
32 Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.
33 Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.
34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:
35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.
36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)
This repeats what we have heard already. Whoever fears Him, regardless of which nation he belongs to, is accepted with Him. With God there is “no respect of persons” (Romans 2:11).
The general meaning is: a person’s behaviour — his “person” as we say, his whole outward performance — does not make him pleasing to God. You cannot behave yourself into God’s favour. That simply does not work. One should fear Him — that is, believe Him — and thus work righteousness. Then one is accepted by God.
Here it is explained that God makes no distinction between Jew and Gentile. That is the application here. It makes no difference what nation one belongs to. That there is no difference between Jew and Gentile is a fixed theme in the epistle to the Romans. In chapter 10, Joel 2 is quoted: “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” There it is explained that it makes no difference whether one is Jew or Gentile.
Peter does say that this word was sent to the children of Israel, because the people of Israel are held responsible for the word God has sent them. God entrusts His word primarily to Israel, but not exclusively.

Acts 10:37–38
37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;
38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

Those people who were healed then all eventually died. Yet they were still delivered
right level.
Sickness is the beginning of death — the working of corruption. Death and sin are the powers of the devil. All mankind lies in the power of “the wicked one”. Sickness is one of the expressions of that. Since we are not yet redeemed in our bodies, we become just as ill as any unbeliever. If someone claims otherwise, they are jumping ahead of God’s programme and claiming something to which they have no right in the present time.

Acts 10:39–43
39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:
40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;
41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.
42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.
43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.
Peter is always so brief and to the point: “the Jews killed Him, but God raised Him up.” God has undone what the Jews did. “Jesus of Nazareth” (v.38) is the One who would be made manifest; God raised Him up and granted that He, the Lord, should be openly seen — not by all the people, but by the witnesses “chosen before of God”, that is, by those who had eaten and drunk with Him after His resurrection.
“You can only bear witness to things you have experienced yourself” — things you have seen with your own eyes, and of which you later give an account. That is what “testifying” is. “We are witnesses of all things which he did…”
And then Peter draws the line through to us: all the prophets bear witness to this same Jesus, that “through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.” That “whosoever” again opens the door wide: Jew or Gentile, it does not matter — faith in Him brings forgiveness through His Name.

Acts 10:37–38
37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;
38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.
Those people who were healed at that time have all since died. Yet they were still delivered from the one who has “the power of death” (Hebrews 2:14), because they received something of the resurrection life of Christ. We must be careful not to draw wrong conclusions — namely, that every illness which was healed was directly and individually sent by the devil. That is not the case. But it is true that everyone who is ill is, in that sense,

“oppressed of the devil”. We simply need to take these things at the right level.
Sickness is the beginning of death — it is the working of corruption. Death and sin are the powers of the devil. The whole human race lies in the power of “the wicked one”. Sickness is an expression of that. Since we have not yet been redeemed as to our bodies, we fall ill just as much as any unbeliever. If someone claims otherwise, they are jumping ahead in God’s programme and claiming something to which they have no right at present.

Acts 10:39–43
39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:
40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;
41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.
42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.
43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.
Peter is always very brief and direct: “the Jews crucified Him, but God raised Him up.” God has undone what the Jews did.
“Jesus of Nazareth” from verse 38 is the One who would be made manifest. God raised Him up and “gave” that He, the Lord Jesus Christ, should be revealed — not to the whole nation, but only to “witnesses”. These are those, including Peter, “chosen before of God.” At the very least, that includes “the Twelve”.
After He had risen “from the dead” — literally from among the dead — they ate and drank with Him. In this way they became witnesses of His resurrection. If they had only known Him and walked with Him before His death, they would not have been qualified as witnesses, for the purpose is not primarily that the earthly life of Jesus should be preached, but His resurrection. All the more so because He Himself would no longer show Himself publicly.
The intention from of old was that once He had risen “from the dead” as the Deliverer, He would make Himself known in the Church — that is, only to believers would He reveal Himself.
“From the dead” means: with the rest of the dead left behind. It indicates that He came out from among the other dead. It implies His right as Firstborn, His appointment as Firstborn, the Firstfruits “from the dead” (1 Corinthians 15:20), King and High Priest of the New Covenant. Scripture does not always spell all of that out, but it is what is bound up with the expression.
The Firstborn is, by definition, the Judge. That is said here too (v.42). The preaching would be this: “that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.” He became that by His resurrection as Firstborn from the dead.

In Acts 17 this is stated again. “Whosoever believeth in him” in verse 43 is in line with, “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” When Paul quotes that (Romans 10:13), he immediately adds: “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?” (Romans 10:14)
How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? Here, in verse 43, it says: “To him give all the prophets witness.” Peter is saying: this promise, that whosoever believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins through His Name, has long been foretold by all the prophets.

Acts 10:44–48
44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.
45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.
46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,
47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?
48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.
The Holy Ghost came with power upon all who heard the Word — that is what “fell” means: power from above. Power “from on high” that comes down is described as “falling”. The Holy Spirit manifested Himself outwardly, visibly, so that we do not imagine that whenever someone receives the Holy Spirit they will speak in tongues. The other way round is true: according to Scripture, speaking in tongues can only occur if someone has received the Holy Spirit. But now that the Spirit is active in a different way in our dispensation, we do not speak in tongues, because the Holy Ghost no longer works like this.
These things have passed away. Tongues would cease, and prophecy likewise, says 1 Corinthians 13. The phenomena from Acts 2, on the Day of Pentecost, are repeated here as a sign for Peter — but now in a Gentile household. That is how he later refers to it. It becomes a sign he can use afterwards.
Peter says that this message is intended for all people, and therefore also for Cornelius. It turns out to be a very important event, partly because such a simple story is told in such detail. The believers (v.45) are shaken — thrown off balance — because “the gift of the Holy Ghost” is poured out also on the Gentiles. That is precisely why it happens visibly: to show it, to demonstrate it.
The translators wrote “with strange tongues” but the text just says “with tongues” — “languages”. They heard them “magnify God”. That is the same as in Acts 2:11: “we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.” That is about Church truth. Here the content is exactly the same.
Verse 47 confirms that the normal practice was: when someone came to faith, he was baptized straightaway. In Caesarea that was no problem, as

it lies on the sea. These believers also receive the Holy Ghost, with the same accompanying signs. That is highly unusual, but here it serves a specific purpose: from God's side it is the confirmation of Peter's ministry in the house of Cornelius.
Peter does not baptize them himself, because it does not matter who does it. Someone baptises "in the Name of", that is: "on behalf of", "in the stead of". The Lord Jesus Himself did not baptise; His disciples did, although the act is still credited to Him.
Paul says: "I thank God that I baptized none of you…" to the Corinthians — and then he corrects himself: "And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other." (1 Corinthians 1:14–16). It had clearly not made a deep impression on him who exactly he had baptised.
They would be baptised in water, but the one who performs it does so in the Name of the Lord Jesus. He is the One who causes us to be born again; He gives us new life. With Him we have died, been buried, and are raised, and that is what baptism pictures. When we are baptised by someone, it is always "in the Name of the Lord".
Peter and the others — believers from among the Jews — now receive lodging with Cornelius, the Gentile. The Lord once said that believers out of the Jews will need their friends among the Gentiles to receive them into their houses (cf. Luke 16).
Peter, who has "the key", arrives here with his whole company in the house of a Gentile who gives him hospitality. That is essentially how things go throughout the book of Acts. The story may seem long-winded, but one such passage is again a summary of the whole book. Peter historically opened the door of the Gospel to the Gentiles. Paul then passes through that open door, constantly referring back to these chapters.

Acts 11:1–18
1 And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.
2 And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him,
3 Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.
4 But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying,
5 I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me:
6 Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.
7 And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.
8 But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.
9 But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.
10 And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into

heaven.
11 And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me.
12 And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house:
13 And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter;
14 Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.
15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.
16 Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.
17 Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?
18 When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

Those “of the circumcision” (v.2) — believers from a Jewish background — contend with Peter. Here we are already in Jerusalem, on the way towards chapter 15, where the situation has completely escalated. Barnabas and Paul have been on missionary journeys, with many Gentile conversions as a result.

“The uncircumcision” / “the foreskin” stands as a symbol over against the Law. Much of the Jewish Law is bound up with food laws. Hence the accusation: “You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them” — in other words, you must have eaten unclean food.

In verse 12: it was an angel, but here Peter says “the Spirit” spoke. An angel is a spirit, and the Spirit is an “Angel” (a Messenger). “Nothing doubting” means: believing, trusting. Romans 4:20 says: “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief…” Doubt is unbelief, the opposite of faith.

“So then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life!” (v.18) — for Jews this is something extraordinary, as the following chapters will show. Here it concerns believers from among the Jews — people who are born again, but with a Jewish background. They ultimately accept this and glorify God.

This is an important matter, because it illustrates that Scripture was first given to Israel in general and later to the Jewish people in particular. Romans 3:1–2:

“What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.”

Israel was originally the chosen people. That is no longer the case in the same way. God’s promises of new life, of the New Covenant, were first made to Abraham and then to Israel. But they were certainly not limited to Israel.

Since the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the Church of God is the royal priestly people to whom “the oracles of God” are entrusted. “Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost” (v.16), it turns out, was not only meant for “you” (the Jews), but for everyone who believes — including the Gentiles. God has demonstrated that, Peter says (v.17), by giving those Gentiles the same gift as He gave to us — in the same way as to Peter and the apostles “at the beginning” (v.15), a clear reference to Pentecost in Acts 2. It is exceptional that it is accompanied by these signs, especially speaking in tongues, so that it becomes absolutely clear that there is no difference.

This demonstration — a sign of the presence and working of the Holy Ghost — is Peter’s final argument. It is not a doctrinal argument (that comes above all with Paul), but a sign, and that is fitting because it is the Jews who require a sign (1 Corinthians 1:22), and this is meant precisely for them. They are the ones who are protesting (vv.1–3).

But they are first of all believers, who have already learned that a large part of Judaism is deception and cannot stand in the light of Christ — otherwise they would never have come to faith in the Lord Jesus. Here they understand it. Not that this is the last word on the matter, for the next question will be whether these Gentiles must now live according to Jewish principles or not, as we see in Acts 15. That is not forbidden, but it has no value before God. That is later set out doctrinally in great detail in the epistles.

After this, with the conversion of Saul, the story moves on. Paul must go through the door which Peter has opened — to the Gentiles. That is what we find from Acts 11:19 onward.

Acts 11:19–20

19 Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

20 And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

Believers from Jerusalem were scattered, among other places, to Cyprus. From that

hearing among the Two Tribes and then tries the Greek-speaking synagogue. He cannot get the Gospel in among the Two Tribes, and so he turns, in principle, to the Ten — not literally in geography at that moment, but symbolically in terms of calling.

Acts 11:21–24

21 And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

22 Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

23 Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

24 For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.
In Antioch a Christian congregation arose. People came to faith and gathered as what we would call a “local church”. We now hear of a church in Jerusalem and a church in Antioch.
Of course, in reality there is only one Church, and She is not tied to any place. Believers in Jerusalem and believers in Antioch are all part of that one Church. What we call a “local church” is simply a local expression of the Church.
At this stage, everything is still, in a practical sense, supervised from Jerusalem, because in some way the Church still has her “domicile” there. In practice, that is; officially that has long since ceased to be so. The following verses show that, if you read a little between the lines.
Barnabas has held a leading position since the end of Acts 4. He is the man whose original name was Joses (Joseph), and who, typologically, represents the Ten Tribes of Israel. In chapter 9 it was Barnabas who introduced Paul to the apostles in Jerusalem.
Now Barnabas comes from Jerusalem to Antioch to see what is going on — and he accepts the situation as it is.

Acts 11:25–27
25 Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:
26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.
27 And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.
Barnabas, who was older than Paul, acts from the beginning as his mentor, because typologically he represents the Ten Tribes of Israel. In that capacity he goes to Tarsus to look for Saul.
Now that the door to the Gentiles has been opened through Peter, and congregations are arising among them abroad, there is room for Paul to begin exercising his ministry. In the end, Paul becomes the pattern for the Church. If you want to know what the earthly “position” of the Church is, you must first see who Paul is. Then you arrive at the Gentile to whom “salvation is committed”, and who also proclaims it — as a Gentile to the Jews.
Barnabas and Paul teach the believers in Antioch, and through this they come to understand how things really stand. They are taught that believers share in Christ, that they are blessed “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3), and that they are members of the Body of Christ.
Under their leadership, the believers — disciples, followers of Jesus — are called Christians for the first time in Antioch, and that name has remained the standard. Christians are Christians because they belong to Christ and share in Him. Everything boils down to one thing: to know Him.
As far as Paul’s Jewish background is concerned, he says:
“Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all

things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.” (Philippians 3:8)
Here in Acts we see, in practice, the origin of Christianity. Not the origin of the Church herself — that was at the resurrection of Christ — but the arising of the Christian testimony among the nations.
More believers come from Jerusalem to Antioch. Watch the movement: the practical “home base” of the Church shifts from Jerusalem to Antioch, from the Jews to the Gentiles.
In Galatians 2 Paul recounts how Peter came from Jerusalem to Antioch — perhaps as part of what is briefly summarised here as: “there came prophets from Jerusalem”. Those could also have included apostles, because apostles are prophets as well, in that they belong to the first generation of believers and speak directly for God.
The speakers and writers of the New Testament are prophets, because they pass on the Word of God directly. We possess those New Testament books and the doctrinal expositions in the epistles; they did not. Therefore there were still prophets **then** — but only then, and not afterwards.

Acts 11:28–30
28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.
29 Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea:
30 Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.
Why is this famine, foretold by Agabus, recorded in the Bible, when it is already past history? Because it points beyond itself to the “famine” that now fills the world — not a material famine, but a spiritual one. It is about our whole present dispensation.
Scripture often gives a prophecy that is fulfilled quite soon in history, but the real and deeper fulfilment still lies beyond that.
“Agabus” is related to agapē and means “love”. Here, for the first time, we truly have a church among the Gentiles. There, a collection is taken for “the brethren which dwelt in Judaea” — for the “home front”. That is the exact opposite of what we are used to today.
Ideally, a local church anywhere in the world ought to be able to support itself. This story of sending relief for the believers in Jerusalem expresses that the roles are being reversed.
The last time we read anything substantial about Jerusalem is when Paul later goes up there, on the occasion of bringing the proceeds of this collection. That already shows that the church in Jerusalem was not the great powerhouse from which the Gospel went out to the nations. It was actually the other way round: the church in Jerusalem was sustained partly by believers among the Gentiles, because circumstances in Jerusalem were poor.
Among other things, they had sold all their property. One major reason was undoubtedly that the believers there clung to the Law. That is always damaging for a Christian and for a Christian community.

On top of that, the believers in Jerusalem were persecuted — they were driven out. Eventually Jerusalem was completely destroyed, and then there was no Christian church left there at all; the supposed “home front” had completely vanished.
The church in Antioch therefore becomes more important in practice than the one in Jerusalem. That congregation, under the leadership of Barnabas and Saul — Joseph and Benjamin — is, as it were, more important than that of Juda, of Jacob (James) in Jerusalem. The roles are swapped.

Acts 12
Acts 12 begins with the martyrdom of James the apostle, one of the Twelve. In verse 3 Peter is imprisoned, and then miraculously delivered. That had happened once before. The chapter ends with the death of Herod Agrippa I, who is thought to have died in AD 44. So the story starts with the death of James.

Acts 12:1–2
1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.
2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.
We are told very little more about this James. Later we meet another James — in this chapter and in chapter 15 — and that is the same man, “the Lord’s brother”, who also wrote the epistle of James. But about this James in verse 2, this is all we hear after the Gospels.
From non-biblical church history we gather that James set out on journeys almost at once. Most of the apostles left Jerusalem fairly quickly after the Lord had said to them: “Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”
James went west and ended up in Compostela, in northern Spain — known to us as “Santiago de Compostela” (“Saint James of the shell”). It is fairly certain that the Celts lived there in those days. I regard them as the heirs, the descendants, of the Ten Tribes of Israel. That is where he went.
The idea is that James, after at most about ten years, returned to Jerusalem. On that occasion he was arrested by Herod and beheaded. Afterwards his body is said to have been taken back to Compostela. That place then became a centre of pilgrimage because of the tomb of Saint James.
Being killed “with the sword” means beheading. That illustrates that the Jews lose their leading position in the Church and in the work of God. They are no longer the “head”. The same is pictured in the beheading of John the Baptist, whom the Lord Jesus Himself called the greatest prophet of the Old Covenant. Yet he is beheaded, because an end comes to the Old Covenant and with it, to the privileged position of the unbelieving Jewish people.
But all the martyrs knew they would be rewarded with the “martyr’s crown”. James is a servant of the Lord, used by Him in His own way. Undoubtedly that is why this incident is recorded for us — as the prelude to what follows.

Acts 12:3–5
3 And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)
4 And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.
5 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.
I do not underestimate the power of prayer, but if you suggest to me that this “unceasing prayer of the church” was the cause of Peter’s release, I have to say: be careful — the text does not say that.
Of course they prayed. People were worried, believers too, and rightly so they brought that to the Lord. But whether that is the reason the Lord freed Peter from prison is not stated. You might say: “Yes, but afterwards they surely thanked God for it”. That proves nothing. Personally, I thank the Lord for everything — even for things the devil throws at me. Those are in fact my favourites: if you receive something from the devil and then thank the Lord for it, it is the best way to thwart the devil.
So we should not jump to conclusions. What we can say is: this is what the Church does under such circumstances — they pray.
This Herod, king of the Jews, saw that killing Christians pleased the Jews. He realised that in this way he could win the favour of the Jewish people, and so “he proceeded further to take Peter also”.
It was around Passover, the days that are the expression of New Testament truth. Peter and the others sit in prison, heavily guarded, but by the intervention of the Angel of the Lord they simply walk out past the guards and through the closed doors.
This imprisonment of Peter follows on from that of James. Humanly speaking things end badly for James and better for Peter, but in essence it is the same thing.
James stands for a Jewish situation; Peter does as well. Peter always represents the believers out of the Jews. He was one of the first to come to faith and is thus a picture of those out of the Jews who came to faith after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He is a picture of Jewish Christians, of the Jewish background of the Church.
Peter is imprisoned. In a figurative sense that cannot be undone — it is a picture of the position of Jewish believers. Four quaternions — four times four soldiers — guard him. The number four in general is connected with the material, visible world, with its four points of the compass. The Jews are always on the run, always stigmatised: the people that “do not belong here”. Peter’s stay in prison is brief, however.

Acts 12:6–10
6 And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.
7 And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying,

Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.
8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.
9 And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.
10 When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.
The tension mounts. Herod is about to “bring him forth”, but on that very night Peter sleeps between two soldiers, bound with two chains. The guards are on duty at the door — and Peter sleeps.
Then suddenly the “angel of the Lord” stands there. That is the Lord Himself — the Risen One, the One who has been raised. And His word is the same as always: “Arise”. That is what He says to this day. That is the message of the Gospel.
Christ is the “brightness of his glory” (Hebrews 1:2 in its context), and so light shines in the “house”, the cell. They go out through the gate, which means they are not hindered by the material world. They are both unseen — and therefore, as it were, have a heavenly body, the body of an angel.
But then why must Peter put on his sandals and cloak? Perhaps these too are made invisible for the occasion. I think we will not leave our clothes lying on earth at the rapture of the Church; I think all will become unseen, because that is how I have always understood the rapture: not that we shoot straight up visibly while everyone watches us go, but that we are changed in an instant and become unseen, so that we can simply walk out of the room without having to open the door.
I believe that, in principle, we already have that body. That we do not see it is another matter. 2 Corinthians 5:1 says: “For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God…” That does suggest that it already exists. Perhaps not a watertight argument, but at least an indication.
Then there is Romans 8:18, which I find stronger, and 2 Corinthians 3:18, where it says that we are already being “changed into the same image from glory to glory”. The idea is that we already have that new body, but that only the degree of glorification still has to come to light. The glorification of the body is already underway, but not yet in the sense that it is visible.
Romans 8:18 says: “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” — not “which we shall receive”, but “revealed in us”, assuming we already possessed it, but hidden.
We do not see it — but that is not decisive. We should regard the earthly, the material world in general, as a kind of wrapping, a covering of the unseen things; even as the very cause of our not seeing the unseen. It is the limitation. Once that limitation is removed, the unseen things are made manifest.

For the occasion, Peter is apparently in such a body. Yet he is still Peter, and he must put on his sandals and cloak — a travelling cloak, a coat for the road. The sandals take us back to: “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Romans 10:15). Peter still has journeys ahead of him, so he needs his shoes and cloak. That is what they picture.

Acts 12:11–12
11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.
12 And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.
When I read this, I think: the “invisible man” suddenly becomes visible again. Peter comes to himself; he realises again what it means to be in the body, and finds himself outside the prison.
“Herod” — the king of the Jews — and “the expectation of the people of the Jews” are treated as one unit. Peter regards himself as no longer part of that. He is delivered out of the hand of Herod, that is, out of the grip of Judaism — for that is what it represents here.
Where does Peter go? To Mary, who is always and everywhere a picture of the Ten Tribes of Israel. This Mary is the mother of John, known to us as Mark, the writer of the Gospel of Mark. Peter and this John belong together: the believers from the Two Tribes and those from the Ten Tribes of Israel.
They are “many gathered together praying”. In verse 5 it was “the church” that was gathered and praying; here there are people gathered in the house of Mary and John. It remains exactly the same thing: an illustration of the Church and her position in the present age.

Acts 12:13–17
13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda.
14 And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.
15 And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel.
16 But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.
17 But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.
This little detail — that Rhoda goes to the gate — is important for us. What is striking is that contact with Peter is not made at once. They know he is at the door, but they do not immediately let him in — not even the maid.

Only when they eventually open the gate and see him do they “wonder” — they are astonished. A certain distance remains between Peter and the rest of those gathered in the house.
That pictures the distance between believers from the Jews and the rest of the Church. “Messianic Jews” today often do everything they can to avoid the Greek word “Christos” and the ordinary Greek name “Jesus”, for fear we might think they are just like us — or perhaps more, for fear that they might be seen as just like us.
From their side especially there is the insistence: they are and remain Jews and would rather not be called “Christians” in this present time. Why, I honestly do not know; I have never been able to discover the real reason. Yet they are Christians — but “of Jewish background”. That is exactly what we see illustrated here: a distinct category, a certain distance.
My experience, however, is that when Jews truly come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, they become active — they become Christians with far more zeal and dedication than many Gentiles.

Acts 12:18–23
18 Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter.
19 And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode.
20 And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country.
21 And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them.
22 And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.
23 And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.
When day broke, there was no small commotion among the soldiers: where on earth had Peter gone? Herod searched for him, could not find him, interrogated the guards properly, and then ordered that they be led away to execution. After that he moved from Judaea down to Caesarea and stayed there.
Herod had it in his mind to take action against the people of Tyre and Sidon. But they all came to him with one accord, and, having persuaded Blastus, the king’s chamberlain, they begged for peace, because their own land depended on the king’s territory for food.
On an appointed day, Herod put on royal robes, sat on his throne, and made a public address to them. The people cried out: “The voice of a god, and not of a man!”
Herod was being treated as if he were divine, given honour and value that belong to God alone. Of course, he should immediately have said that he was not a god, only a servant of God. But he did not.

Flavius Josephus records that at this very occasion Herod was suddenly struck with severe pains in his stomach or abdomen, had to be carried away, and died five days later. A man who is king of the Jews and yet accepts divine honour is judged by God.
The arrogance and pride of Herod mirrors that of the Jewish nation as a whole — the haughtiness of the people. I am aware that what is said of the people as a whole does not necessarily apply to every individual Jew. But a nation that presents itself as God's own special people, while in practice not walking with Him, inevitably comes under judgment.
Herod's death is a picture of God's judgment upon the Jewish nation. You can see this in what happened later to the Jewish state after the period covered by Acts: the Jewish state was destroyed, Jerusalem and the temple included – as Josephus describes.
Scripture shows that God has "let the world go", as it were. Since His contact with the world ran via Israel, that means He has first of all let Israel go – more specifically, in this phase of history, the Jewish people. God hides Himself from that people and from the world.
Over against that, we then read:

Acts 12:24–25
24 But the word of God grew and multiplied.
25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.
Notice the contrast between verse 24 and the verses just before. Those events seem, at first glance, to have nothing to do with one another: Herod dies — and the Word of God grows! But they are in fact closely related, especially in what they symbolise.
Herod's death points to the Jewish people being set aside, and something else taking their place. That the Word of God "grew and multiplied" means not only that it was proclaimed more widely, but also that it was accepted — people came to faith in that Word, and it filled the hearts of believers. That is the exact opposite of being eaten from within by worms, as with Herod.
So the message is: on the one hand the Jewish people are judged; on the other hand the Gospel is to be preached to all nations, and salvation finds its home among the Gentiles. Hence the next name we meet: Barnabas, whose name means "son of consolation".
Verse 25 ties back to the end of Acts 11, where Barnabas and Saul had gone up to Jerusalem to deliver the proceeds of the collection. Behind this lies the principle from Hebrews 7: the one who blesses is greater than the one who is blessed. Through this arrangement, the church at Antioch is placed in rank above the church at Jerusalem.
That demonstrates that salvation does not have its domicile with the Jews in Jerusalem, but among the Gentiles — here, in Antioch. It is the church that arose there through missionary work from Cyprus, and through the Cypriot Joses (Barnabas), together with Benjamin (Saul), that blessing is carried to Jerusalem.
Now Barnabas and Saul return "from Jerusalem" back to Antioch. This also means that the events of chapter 12 — Peter's imprisonment and

deliverance — took place in Jerusalem while Barnabas and Saul were there. That whole story shows the setting aside of the Jewish people and the transfer of salvation to Antioch.
That is how chapter 12 ends — and at the same time it is the introduction to chapter 13.

Acts 13:1–3
1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.
2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.
3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.
So there were a number of believers there, described as “prophets and teachers”. As they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Ghost — that is, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, whom they were serving — said: “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.”
“Separate” is essentially: sanctify, set apart for God’s service.
Barnabas and Saul have hands laid on them, which means that a specific responsibility, which lies with the Church, is formally entrusted to these two men. (We saw earlier how laying on of hands expresses the transfer of responsibility.)
The responsibility that once lay with Israel — to preserve, teach, and proclaim the Word of God — now lies with the Church. Not necessarily with every individual member, but certainly with those whom the Spirit appoints for that purpose. We will see this further developed in Acts 19.
Barnabas and Saul are then sent out with a specific mission, and thus they become missionaries, in Greek: apostles, “sent ones”. They work in the name of the Church, and therefore the work they do is really the work of the Church as a whole.

Acts 13:4–9
4 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.
5 And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.
6 And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus:
7 Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.
8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.
9 Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him,

It is important to see that there is only One who truly appoints these men. It is not the result of human organisation; the Lord Himself, unseen, does this. In this context He is referred to as “the Holy Ghost”. Scripture says: “the Lord is that Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:17).
John here is the one we know as Mark.
Salamis lies on the eastern side of the island of Cyprus; Paphos is the western harbour, its name meaning something like “most beautiful”.
On Cyprus they encounter “a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew” — three descriptions treated as one package. His name is Bar-jesus: literally “son of Jesus”, but “Jesus” is the Greek form of “Jehoshua”, Joshua. So Bar-jesus is “son of Joshua” (“bar-Jozua”). Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim, Ephraim was son of Joseph – so he is, in effect, presenting himself as “son of Joseph”. Yet he is a false prophet.
He is attached to the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, the Roman governor of the island, a prudent man. It seems this sorcerer had an official position at court. From ancient times rulers were often advised by astrologers, soothsayers, magicians — people like this Bar-jesus.
Sergius Paulus, as governor, is expected to know what is going on in his territory. Two strangers arrive with a new message; naturally they are summoned to the seat of government. He “desired to hear the word of God” — he was genuinely eager, and he came to faith.
Bar-jesus is his Jewish name; in Greek he is called Elymas. That name corresponds to the Arabic “Allyman”, meaning “powerful man”. Sorcerers were considered powerful because they could do things others could not; thus they held influence and power.
Scripture presents sorcerers as people influenced by demons. And in the Bible demons are without exception evil spirits. They attempt to turn people away from faith in the Lord Jesus. This sorcerer, this false prophet, is a Jew. According to Scripture, contemporary Judaism — like every religion — is used by demons.
I draw this from Matthew 12:43–45, where the Lord speaks of the unclean spirit who leaves a man, wanders through dry places seeking rest, finds none, and then says: “I will return into my house whence I came out.” He finds it empty, swept, and garnished; then he takes seven other spirits worse than himself, and they enter in and dwell there. “And the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.”
Which wicked generation? The Jewish people. A demon would be cast out of them: they would be delivered from the Law — but that Law would in fact return in worse form than before.
The Law is used by the adversary, the devil, through his agents. The devil makes use of religion. He has a strong interest in religion: it exalts man, tells him he can, by his own efforts, improve the world — his world, which lies in his power.
The Lord is saying in Matthew 12 that the Jewish people would be delivered from the Law, but that a more severe legalism would return — and in our day, you can see how intense and detailed that legalism has become. It sits on people like a kind of compulsion, you might almost call

it a neurosis; but in religious clothing it is praised as a “beautiful faith”. Yet it occupies itself with the tiniest details of social life and personal life. Normally we would call such bondage demonic. Here it is religiously sanctified. It has everything to do with the devil who keeps people under the Law and persuades them that they will “be as gods” through eating of “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”. That is the “gospel of the serpent”.
It makes people unable to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thus unable to come to Him. There are exceptions, as always, but this is the general situation. Elymas is the personification of that kind of Judaism.
Then Saul — now suddenly called Paul — fixes his eyes on this Jew, this false prophet, this sorcerer, this Bar-jesus, this Elymas, and says:

Acts 13:10–12
10 And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?
11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.
12 Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.
In John 8:44 the Lord says to the Jews, to Judaism: “Ye are of your father the devil.” That is precisely what Paul echoes here: “thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness.”
What is the great judgment upon the Jewish people, and the characteristic mark of that people? Blindness, deafness, and a hardened heart. Elymas becomes physically blind and dependent on others to lead him by the hand. That is a picture of the position of the Jewish people: dependent on other nations — in practice especially on the Ten Tribes, the Anglo-Saxon peoples.
If someone had asked in later ages, “From where did Paul’s ministry begin?” the answer would have been: from Cyprus, the “island of the sea”, from which the rest of these missionary journeys went out. Cyprus in turn is a model for another “island of the sea”: Britain, from which in due course so much missionary work went out into the world.
When the deputy, Sergius Paulus, sees what happens, he believes, being astonished not just at the miracle, but at “the doctrine of the Lord” — the teaching that comes with it.

Acts 13:13–14
13 Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.
14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down.
From Paphos they sail to the coast of what is now Turkey, the area often called “Asia Minor”. They arrive in Perga, a city in Pamphylia.

We are told here that John Mark leaves them and returns to Jerusalem. John Mark evidently represents the Jews who drop out. At first he goes along with them, but as soon as they are about to leave Cyprus, he withdraws. That is a picture of how, in relation to the Gospel, everything begins with Jewish believers — the first disciples and thus the first Christians were Jews — but in the course of time, many from among the Jews fall away. Luke later records that Paul was disappointed by this, so that he did not want to take Mark with him again on the next journey (Acts 15:37–38).
We are not told what they did in Perga. “Pamphylia” can be translated as “of every tribe”, which probably continues the typology: the Gospel goes first to Ephraim (for which Cyprus stands), and from there it goes on “to every tribe”, to the nations as a whole.
They then come to Antioch — not the Antioch in Syria from which they had set out, but another Antioch, in Pisidia. The name “Antioch” is connected with Antiochus — we know “Antiochus Epiphanes” from the book of Daniel, where he prefigures the first beast of Revelation 13. Through Antiochus, “the adversary”, we are led to the devil himself, “the god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4).

These apostles — especially Paul — carry out their ministry in a world that lies in the power of the evil one. It begins at Antioch and ends at Antioch. I see that Antioch as a picture of the world of the nations as such, without distinction between Jew and Gentile.
You could say the same of Antioch in Syria, where the church first arose and where the disciples were first called Christians: in a sense, the cradle of Christianity, in the midst of a dark world.
“Pisidia” can be linked with the idea of something “pitchy” — thick, inky darkness. That is a good description of a world ruled by Antiochus, the adversary. That will be so in the future in a particular way, but in our present dispensation it is already the case: “the whole world lieth in wickedness”.
All missionary work takes place in that setting: in a city in the middle of the world, in pitch darkness. And there, in the midst of that, they find a synagogue, as was usual — the Jews were already scattered throughout the world. On the sabbath day they go in and sit down.
This has always been Paul’s custom, as far as we can see: to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. Everywhere he goes, he begins — where possible — with the synagogue.

Acts 13:15–17
15 And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.
16 Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.
17 The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it.

The “reading of the law and the prophets” was compulsory in the synagogue. Under the Law everything was regulated and ordered. After the readings, if there were visiting teachers present, they could be invited to speak – to bring “a word of exhortation”, literally a word of encouragement.
We understand that “a word of exhortation/comfort” is, by definition, the preaching of the Gospel. Already in the Old Testament, comfort (or consolation) is one of the key words associated with the new covenant – along with grace and peace. Hence, in Jewish tradition the Messiah is called the Comforter (Menachem). Apparently that was well known in the days of the disciples and of Paul.
That is why the Lord Jesus says: “I will send you another Comforter” (John 14:26). He Himself is the Comforter; there could be no doubt about that. If He is the Messiah, then He is the Comforter.
Paul begins: “Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.” The expression “Israelitish men” is, in a sense, a bit generous. In Scripture, the name Israel belongs to the people of God. The Jews Paul is addressing here in Acts 13 are not in fact that people of God in the full, spiritual sense – the Church is. If his hearers wish to bear the name “Israel”, then at the very least they ought to come to faith, or be God-fearing, as verse 16 says. If one truly is Israel, one is assumed to be a believer; otherwise one is not Israel at all, at best still Jacob.
Peter addresses them in similar terms in Acts 2, and then speaks of “Jesus of Nazareth”. Paul is essentially saying exactly the same. If you place Peter’s speech in Acts 2 alongside Paul’s speech here, you will see that the basic content is identical.
“The God of this people of Israel” exalted the people – He promoted them, as it were – and made them Israel, the people of God. This was when they were strangers in the land of Egypt, which is a picture of this dark world and of slavery in the world. There they were foreigners, and the Lord led them out and made them “Ammi” – “My people”. They became “a peculiar people unto Himself”, a royal and priestly people. That is the past.
“With an high arm” means an arm from heaven – a powerful arm. In Scripture the arm represents strength. Hence also our word “army” – a force of arms.

Acts 13:18–21
18 And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness.
19 And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, he divided their land to them by lot.
20 And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.
21 And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.
Now Paul turns to things that would have been rather less pleasant for the Jews to hear. God “suffered their manners” – He put up with their behaviour, their customs, their way of life, their culture, their “mores” – for forty years in the wilderness. Those ways were not very good.

Here we get a compressed summary of the main stages of Israel's history, focusing on events which God Himself brought about.
After bringing them into Canaan, He destroyed seven nations and allotted their land to Israel by lot. Then, for about 450 years, He gave them judges. (Paul does not unpack the chronology here; and we have no reason to doubt it.) Those judges were there to set things right – "judges" and "righters" are essentially the same idea: when something needs putting straight, it must be judged. The Book of Judges is a series of episodes where God again and again intervenes after Israel has got itself into trouble – usually through its own unfaithfulness and unbelief.
Paul is saying: this pattern is repeating now as well.
Then "they desired a king", and God gave them Saul. Saul and his kingship are a picture of the Law, of the rule of the Law. They wanted a Law – they got it. Then they wanted a king to rule over them – they got one, but he stands for the same thing as the Law: a heavy rule over them. They were warned. God said, in effect: if you want a king, you will have to pay taxes, he will claim his rights over you – it is not wise. But they still insisted. Paul is reminding them of this history to show that:

- they were delivered from slavery in Egypt,
- and later from the rule of Saul.

The underlying message is: God has ultimately delivered them from the Law itself.

Acts 13:22–30
22 And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.
23 Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus:
24 When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.
25 And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose.
26 Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.
27 For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him.
28 And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain.
29 And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre.
30 But God raised him from the dead:
After Saul had been set aside, God raised up David as king. Of him God gave this testimony: "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will." From that man's seed – the line of David – God, in accordance with His promise, has raised up for Israel a Saviour, Jesus.

From this point on, Paul's message centres on Him. Jesus of Nazareth, as Son of David, is the fulfiller of the promises made to David. That is evident from several things.
This section is really a fusion of what Peter says and what Stephen says:

- Peter focuses on the Lord Jesus – His ministry and how it ended.
- Stephen, more extensively than Paul does here, rehearses Israel's history.

But the theme is the same: God has delivered Israel. It is clear that He has done these things, and has now finally fulfilled His promises in the resurrection of Christ.
The question is: will Israel, this time, believe? Will they accept what is given to them from God's hand?
John the Baptist, who came first, preached a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. But the Messiah Himself came after John – ultimately, properly speaking, only after His resurrection. John says: "Whom do you suppose that I am? I am not the Christ." He points on to the One coming after him, of whom he is not worthy even to loosen the strap of His sandals – that is, he is not worthy to stand in His place.
John the Baptist is a type of the Lord Jesus in His first coming, before He is actually manifested as the Christ by rising from the dead.
In verse 26 Paul speaks to "children of the stock of Abraham" – that is, physically Abraham's descendants. But he immediately adds: "and whosoever among you feareth God" – so he is addressing Jews and Gentiles together, as becomes clear later in the chapter. He begins with the Jews, but not exclusively.
Salvation is now directly bound up with the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is about Him. And now Paul can say: "To you is the word of this salvation sent" – all the way to Pisidian Antioch.
The Jews dwelling at Jerusalem, together with their rulers – the Sanhedrin under the high priest – did not recognise Him. Nor did they recognise "the voices of the prophets", even though they heard those prophetic writings read out loud every Sabbath. And in condemning Him, they actually fulfilled those very prophecies. How foolish can man be! Utterly blind, in the darkness of Pisidia, as it were.
They wanted Him put to death, though they could find no valid legal cause. So they "desired of Pilate that he should be slain." When they had done everything that was written concerning Him – when the Scriptures had been fulfilled – they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb.
"But God raised him from the dead." That is the decisive turning point.

Acts 13:31–33
31 And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people.
32 And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers,
33 God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

This is virtually the opening of Acts 1 repeated. There were many who had known the Lord Jesus before His death, who had walked with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem. After His resurrection they saw Him again and recognised Him. They are His witnesses to the people. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is a historically attested fact.
Now Paul says: We declare good tidings to you – the Gospel – namely that the promise made to the fathers has been fulfilled. God has fulfilled that promise to us, their children, “in that he hath raised up Jesus again.”
That brings us to the heart of his argument:
“as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.”
“Begotten” is the same idea as “raised up” in verse 32: it means that this statement is addressed to Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David, at the moment when He is appointed as Son of God.
Peter had already said in Acts 2:36: “God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” In Hebrew terms, “Lord” there would be Jehovah.
So “This day have I begotten thee” means: this day I have raised You from the dead. You would not naturally conclude that from simply reading Psalm 2, but hidden within the psalm, that is what is meant. Here in Acts it is made explicit.
“Today” points to a specific day – the day on which the Son of David would be declared and installed as Son of God. That “today” is the day of His resurrection. From that point on, the Lord Jesus Christ appears as the Son of Man, the Son of David, who is at the same time the visible manifestation of the invisible God, who dwells in unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:16).
In the Old Testament, Jehovah is the visible expression of God – the expressed image of His person. Jewish theology has never really had a problem with that. The inevitable conclusion is that Jehovah and the Lord Jesus are one and the same. The Lord Jesus takes that function and title in His resurrection.
He is a man, born on earth as the Son of David – and is later exalted and appointed by God as Jehovah in function: the visible Image of God. That is what Peter says in Acts 2: God has made Him “Lord” (Kurios = the Greek rendering of Jehovah in the Septuagint) and Christ.
We are reading a Greek New Testament; “Jehovah” is a Hebrew name, so we should not expect to see the four-letter Name written out in Greek. The New Testament wisely uses “Kurios” (“Lord”). But it is not in doubt that, in many places, “Lord” carries the weight of the divine Name.
The New Testament often quotes Old Testament verses where the Name Jehovah appears, and applies them directly to the Lord Jesus. Jehovah is the Name given to the manifestation of the Godhead. Whenever God takes form, or speaks so that a voice is heard, it is Jehovah.
Paul in Philippians 2:9 says that God has “highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name”. That is drawn from Isaiah 45:23, where Jehovah says that to Him every knee shall bow. In Philippians 2:10 that is applied directly to Jesus: “that at the name of Jesus every knee

should bow…”. The conclusion is unavoidable: the Lord Jesus bears the Name of Jehovah, because He is Jehovah revealed.
The epistle to the Hebrews develops this further:

- Hebrews 1:1–3: God has spoken in these last days in the Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things. The Son is the brightness of God’s glory and the express image of His person.
- Verse 4: He is “made so much better than the angels”, having inherited a more excellent name than they. So He did not always hold that position in this way; He received it.
- Verse 5 then quotes our verse from Psalm 2: “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.” That is the moment He is installed as Son and as High Priest after the order of Melchisedec (Hebrews 5:5–6), again linked directly to that same “Today have I begotten thee.”

So:

- Before His resurrection, the Lord Jesus was truly the Son of David, a man on earth.
- Through His resurrection, He is declared Son of God with power (Romans 1:3–4), given the Name above every name, and installed as High Priest after the order of Melchisedec.

What He has become since His resurrection, He was not always in that official capacity. And that is vital, because the same pattern will be true of us: we are not yet what we shall be.
He has run His course and “is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). We are called to run our race looking to Him, the author and finisher of faith, knowing that the same God who raised Him will also bring us to glory in Him.

Acts 13:34–41
34 And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.
35 Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.
36 For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption:
37 But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.
38 Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:
39 And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.
40 Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets;
41 Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.
The words “raised” and “begotten” (earlier in the passage) mean “to rise” or “to cause to rise from the dead”. People had been raised from the dead before in Scripture, but here it is about the nature of His resurrection.

The Lord Jesus is the first who was raised from among the dead “now no more to return to corruption” – or, as Romans 6:9–10 says, “Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.” He is the first to rise in newness of life.
Isaiah 55:3 (referred to here as the “sure mercies of David”) promises blessings that are certain, that will not pass away. That is only possible if the David in view – ultimately the Son of David, the Messiah – has everlasting life. The Messiah would bring blessings that are permanent.
Then Paul cites Psalm 16, just as Peter did in Acts 2: “Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” Peter explains there that David cannot have been speaking about himself, because he died, was buried, and his tomb was still with them in those days. David knew that he was speaking about the descendant who would come from his own body. Paul assumes the same understanding here.
David served the counsel of God in his own generation, then fell asleep, was laid with his fathers, and did see corruption. But He whom God raised again – the Lord Jesus – did not see corruption: He was raised on the third day. That is the fulfilment of the promises.
On that basis Paul can say: “Be it known unto you…” – through this Man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.
The Law of Moses could never justify a person. That was never its purpose; rather, it was meant to expose that justification by the Law is impossible. But through this Man, the Lord Jesus, the legal ground was laid on which sinners can be justified (see Romans 10). Here in Acts 13 Paul states that what the Law could not do is done by Christ. Only thus can someone be justified – acquitted – and that on the condition of faith. That is fitting, because sin entered into the world through unbelief; believing is taking God at His spoken word.
So Paul issues a warning, looking back to “that which is spoken in the prophets”. They are not to be unbelievers, not “despisers”.
To despise is literally to put something behind you, to set it aside, to reject it. For the Jews this message is almost unbelievable. They saw themselves as the chosen people of God – and then they are told that God is doing a greater work among the Gentiles! That is hard enough; and on top of that, they are told that this is happening in practice particularly among that other house of Israel – the ten tribes. That leads inevitably to the conclusion that Jesus is the Messiah, because you find Him there, among them.
For the Jews as a whole this is an unpalatable thing, of course. As long as one clings to Judaism and to the Jewish nation as the people of God, things go wrong.
These are, for the moment, the last words spoken in the synagogue here.

Acts 13:42–43
42 And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath.
43 Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

The message is talked about afterwards – and that is exactly what should happen.
The Gentiles want to hear the message from first-hand witnesses, which is very sensible. They ask that the same message might be spoken to them again on the next Sabbath, and they intend to be present in the synagogue to hear it.
“Proselytes” are people who were originally Gentiles, but who had formally joined the Jewish religion. Many of the Jews and these proselytes follow Paul and Barnabas. Notice that from this point onwards it is no longer “Barnabas and Saul”, but “Paul and Barnabas”: once Saul is called Paul, the roles are reversed and Paul is clearly the leading figure.
They speak with these Jews and proselytes and encourage them – literally “exhort” them – to remain in the grace of God. In other words: do not remain under the Law of God. Scripture never tells us “remain under the Law”; it always speaks of God’s grace. That is what we are to live from. God gives us out of “the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 2:7). You do not find that in religion.

Acts 13:44–45
44 And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.
45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.
A week later almost the entire city turns out. Interest is huge; a vast crowd gathers to hear the Word of God.
The Jews see the crowds and are filled with envy. They begin to contradict what Paul is saying – and that contradicting is basically the same as unbelief. A believer receives the Word; the contradictor refuses it by speaking against it, even if it is just by saying “no”. Here they go much further – they oppose and blaspheme.
This message is intended for all people, without distinction between Jew and Gentile. The Jews do not accept that. Anything that is meant equally for Jew and Gentile is felt by them as a threat to their identity. And their identity is in fact very fragile and vulnerable.
From God’s standpoint the distinction has no value. The Jews have been scattered among all nations; they are trying to hold on to something that, in reality, is no longer there. Their genealogical records, from which they could prove descent from Judah, were destroyed when Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70; the temple burned, and with it the family registers stored there.
Yet they still try to preserve that identity. But in practice, before God, it serves no real purpose. Whoever comes to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is born again and receives a new identity – that of Christ Himself, as Paul explains in Romans 5 and elsewhere. In the Church there is “neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free” (Romans 10:12; Galatians 3:28). These are categories belonging to this old world and they have no value before God.
That the Jews become jealous – “filled with envy” – is not a new thing. The two-tribe kingdom (Judah) would be jealous of the ten-tribe kingdom

(Israel); that is already stated in the Old Testament, in the Law and the Prophets, and Paul quotes this in:
Romans 10:19–21 – “I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people; and by a foolish nation I will anger you…”
For the Jews, a “wise” people is the Jewish people living under the Law. Anyone not doing so is, by definition, not only unrighteous but also “foolish”. They regard themselves as the wise nation that ought to instruct the foolish Gentiles (Romans 2) – yet in practice they do not. In fact, the Talmud even tells them to keep their knowledge to themselves.
So, Israel would be made jealous by a Gentile people. From the context in Romans 10, it is clear that this “foolish nation” is the Church.
The same word was preached to the Jews as to the Gentiles. They realised that Gentiles too would be justified by faith, because there is no fundamental difference in God’s eyes. And then they refused to accept it – and so the Word, the salvation, would go to the Gentiles and be entrusted to them. From that point, they wanted it even less.

Acts 13:46–47
46 Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.
47 For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.
Why was it necessary that the Word be spoken first to the Jews? The reason is actually simple: it had been prophesied that it would happen in that order. The Word of God always comes first to Israel, because it was meant to go through them into the world.
So Paul can say, “It was necessary… that the word of God should first have been spoken to you” – implying that this had been announced in advance. That is the force of “should have been”: it was the intention, and it has indeed happened.
Then, “seeing ye put it from you” – they reject the message – they thereby judge themselves unworthy of everlasting life. They do not value it. Those who cling to the Law do not see the importance of grace; within that framework there is no room for it, so it has no value for them.
On that day Paul and Barnabas turn to the Gentiles, starting with those gathered there who do have an interest and came in large numbers. This situation is typical of the beginning of our present dispensation:

- It was preached to the Jews;
- they refused it;
- so it went to the Gentiles and was deposited with them.

Verse 47 explains this, drawing from Isaiah 42 and 49. In Isaiah 49:3 we read: “Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.” The Jews are pleased to apply that verse to themselves and use it to claim any reference to the “servant of the LORD” as national Israel. But they fail to see that Israel in that deep, prophetic sense is Christ Himself. And, insofar

as there is anything more than Christ, it is those who are in Him – the believers. They are “Israel”.
The Lord had said in advance that salvation would be taken from them and go to the Gentiles, to the ten tribes of Israel scattered “unto the ends of the earth”. That is the language of the prophets.

Acts 13:48
48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.
This verse is popular in circles that emphasise election: “as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” Some say, “They were predestined to eternal life, and therefore they believed.”
You can say that these Gentiles were predestined, in the sense that it had been determined in advance, in the Law and the Prophets, that the nations would come to faith – we have just seen that. But at the same time, everyone who comes to faith is “ordained to eternal life”; the two belong together.
I do not read here that one must first be predestined in order to be able to believe, still less that one must be “ordained to faith”. The text does not say that. It says: “ordained to eternal life”.
From other passages in which this word “ordained” is used, it is clear how it works: when someone believes – which is his or her personal responsibility before God – that person thereby comes to share in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One ordained to eternal life, and when we believe, we share in His life.
So how many believed? Exactly as many as were ordained to eternal life – no more and no less. They believed, and so they received eternal life. The believer is appointed to eternal life in the Beloved.

Acts 13:49–52
49 And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.
50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.
51 But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium.
52 And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.
The “word of the Lord” at once spreads further among the Gentiles throughout the whole region.
The Jews, however, stir up the religious and respectable women and the leading men of the city. The religious, law-keeping women become the instigators of persecution. If you want to capture a people, you begin with the women – especially in matters of religion. Paul warns in 2 Timothy 3:6 about those “which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women”. That is exactly what is happening here.
The Jews take the initiative, which leads to persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and they are driven out of the district. Paul and Barnabas simply shake off the dust from their feet and move on. The narrative is

deliberately brief and almost matter-of-fact, so that we do not focus too much on their feelings or the circumstances, but on the pattern.
This becomes the model for what follows in Acts:

- They preach to the Jews;
- the Jews refuse and stir up opposition;
- the apostles are expelled;
- they go to the next place, and the process repeats.

The Lord had already instructed the twelve similarly: if they were not welcomed in a city, they were to “shake off the very dust from your feet” (Luke 9:5) and move on – “forgetting those things which are behind” (Philippians 3:14).
They now come to Iconium, and the disciples are filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost. That means: something is about to happen.

Acts 14:1–4
1 And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.
2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.
3 Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.
4 But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.
In Iconium the same pattern appears as in Antioch. Again, they go into the synagogue of the Jews, and they speak in such a way that a great multitude believes – both Jews and Greeks.
Then “the Jews which believed not” stir up the Gentiles and embitter their minds against the brethren. Here you can see that “believing” (v.1) and “obeying” (v.2) are essentially synonyms: there could just as well have stood “the Jews who were unbelieving”.
Again the Jews incite the unbelieving Gentiles against Paul and Barnabas. The Jews take the initiative and are therefore primarily responsible for the hostility that the Gentiles then carry out. They are not only unfaithful to the Lord themselves, but they lead the opposition to the Gospel.
This time, however, the brethren are not immediately forced out. They stay a long time in Iconium, “speaking boldly in the Lord”. This boldness has to do with the fact that the Gospel had previously been veiled or hidden. The veil of religion is taken away, and so they, like Peter earlier, are “free to speak” (compare Acts 2:29).
A bold preaching of grace stands in sharp contrast to the Law. It takes real freedom of heart to practise and proclaim such a message. We are not under the Law; we are not religious in the sense of having a list of commandments to keep. We are completely free – and in that freedom we have come to know the Lord and to understand the truth.
That Truth – Christ Himself, the Word of God – works in us. It is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1:16). Not the

Law, but “the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11).
The Lord gives testimony to “the word of his grace” and confirms the preaching of that word with signs and wonders done by their hands. In Antioch there was indeed a sign (a decisive turning to the Gentiles), but no miracles described. Here in Iconium there are miracles as signs – something no-one can ignore.
In verse 4, “the Jews” is used in a general sense for the unbelieving Jews. The city is divided: some are “with the Jews”, others “with the apostles”. So there are only two sides: you are either with the (unbelieving) Jews or with the apostles. Scripture speaks very plainly here; it does not soften its verdict on the Jewish resistance.

Acts 14:5–12
5 And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them,
6 They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about:
7 And there they preached the gospel.
8 And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked:
9 The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed,
10 Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.
11 And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.
12 And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.
A riot breaks out, involving both Gentiles and Jews, with their leaders. There is an attempt to mistreat and stone the apostles. When they become aware of this, they flee to the cities of Lycaonia – Lystra and Derbe – and the surrounding region. There too they continue to preach the Gospel.
The healing in verses 8–10 parallels the healing of the lame man in Acts 3–4. There it was at the temple gate; here it is in Lystra. In both cases, the man had never walked. This man “heard Paul speak”; Paul looks at him intently and sees that he has faith to be healed. Then he cries with a loud voice: “Stand upright on thy feet!” – and the man leaps up and walks.
Not being able to see, not being able to hear, not being able to walk – in all these cases the point is the same: one has no life. Life, in practice, is “walk”. If you cannot walk, you do not live, in the biblical sense. So these healings are pictures of resurrection.
Here the man has been lame “from his mother’s womb”. That is always the description of the ten tribes of Israel: they have never served the Lord, not even under the Law. Under the Old Covenant they did not walk with God; but now, under the New Covenant, they do. That is what is being illustrated again here, now in Galatia, among the old Celtic peoples.

As so often, people who are left to their own religious imagination react in extremes. They see the miracle and immediately conclude that Paul and Barnabas are gods or demi-gods. They go from unbelief to unrestrained superstition and must be reined in again. That is the problem with people who do not know the truth: they swing between extremes.
The healing of the lame man is a **sign**, and it fits perfectly into this chapter: it reminds us of what all those miracles in the Gospels point to – the healing of the ten tribes, rather than the two. It fits the whole line of argument.

Acts 14:13–17
13 Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.
14 Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out,
15 And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:
16 Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.
17 Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.
Every city seems to have had its priest of Jupiter, the chief god. Jupiter corresponds to Zeus, the chief god of the Greeks. Mercurius is the messenger of the gods, often depicted with wings on his heels. As the spokesman, Paul is given that name; Barnabas, as the more dignified, quiet presence, is identified with Jupiter.
But Paul and Barnabas are horrified. They tear their clothes and rush into the crowd, protesting: we are men of like passions with you. They call on them to turn away from these vain things – idols and false religion – to the living God, the active God, the Creator of heaven, earth and sea and everything in them.
God had allowed the nations in past times to walk in their own ways. God, as Creator of heaven and earth, is by definition the true Most High – not Jupiter.
Jupiter (Latin) is the same as Zeus (Greek), and in practice he is exactly the same as “Allah” in current Islamic usage: not God, but the devil, the adversary. That becomes evident from the way “Allah” is introduced as an alternative to Judaism and Christianity – that already marks him as “the prince of this world” (John 14:30), not our God. The same applies to Jupiter or Zeus.
In mythology, Zeus gained power through conflict: there was Kronos first, then a revolt, and Zeus seized power. That means he is not the Creator of heaven and earth; for whatever power he has, he seized it. That makes him a fitting picture of the devil, Satan of the Bible.
Paul’s point is that the true God – the Creator – has indeed been active in His creation, even though people often think that after “the beginning” He

withdrew and left it to itself. The biblical view is that creation is not finished; God will make a new heaven and a new earth, a new creation, and we have not yet reached that point. So God is still at work; it is one continuous work, including the six-day work of Genesis.
He has “suffered all nations to walk in their own ways”, yet He has not left Himself without witness. He has done good: sending rain, fruitful seasons, filling hearts with food and gladness. So even in the world’s history of ignorance and idolatry, God’s goodness and providence stand as a constant testimony to His living presence.

Acts 14:18–22
18 And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.
19 And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.
20 Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.
21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch,
22 Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.
The people at Lystra were ready to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas as if they were gods; with great difficulty the apostles managed to stop them. Then Jews arrive from Antioch and Iconium – the places Paul and Barnabas have just visited. They follow them and “persuade the crowds”. This time Paul really is stoned, dragged out of the city and left there as a corpse – “supposing he had been dead”. They literally treat him as a dead body and haul him outside the city.
But as the disciples stand around him, he stands up. He even goes straight back into the city. We are not told whether the inhabitants saw him again or how they reacted – they had thought he was dead and there he is, alive before them. I’m inclined to think he really was dead, and that the Lord raised him up.
The very next day he sets off with Barnabas to Derbe – which, humanly speaking, after a serious stoning, is in itself a wonder. Derbe is the end-point of this missionary journey; from there they retrace their route back through the same towns as far as Antioch.
On the way they go on “confirming the souls of the disciples” – that is, strengthening the practical lives (“souls”) of believers in those local Christian communities. They do that by encouraging them to “continue in the faith” – which is the same thing as chapter 13:43, “to continue in the grace of God”. Faith is always faith in that grace.
The path – the route – to the kingdom of God, to that new creation, is a path “through much tribulation”. Those pressures and afflictions are characteristic of this present earthly life.

Acts 14:23

23 And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

It is important not to use this verse to prove that a congregation should appoint its own elders. Who is it that appoints elders here? Paul and Barnabas. And for whom do they do this? For the churches – who needed elders – but the ones actually taking the action are the apostles.

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church. The implied question to the churches is then: “Do you accept these as elders?” The believers respond with their agreement – which could indeed be by raising hands in affirmation.

So you cannot legitimately derive from this verse that the members of the congregation themselves choose elders from among their number. You cannot “make” elders; you can only recognise those whom God has made elders.

Acts 20 confirms this. Paul summons the elders of the church at Ephesus and says to them in verse 28: “…the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers.” So it is the Holy Spirit who appoints them; they are not chosen from below. Modern practice often involves “appointing elders” who are not actually elders in the biblical sense at all, and imagining that by calling them elders they become such. But if there are no elders, you cannot appoint any; if there are, you still cannot make them elders – you can only acknowledge them.

Here there were men who, in a relatively short time, had enough grasp of New Testament – i.e. church – truth to function as elders and teachers in those assemblies. And beyond that, part of the ongoing teaching is carried out by the Holy Spirit Himself, who would lead believers into all truth (John 16:13).

Then comes prayer and fasting to the Lord “on whom they believed”, expressing that all – apostles, elders and congregation – submit themselves to Him and to His Spirit, and accept those elders in that way.

Acts 14:24–28

24 And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.
25 And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia:
26 And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.
27 And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.
28 And there they abode long time with the disciples.

They travel back through Pisidia to Pamphylia, preach again in Perga, then go down to the port of Attalia and from there sail back to Antioch in Syria – the other Antioch, the one from which they had originally been “commended to the grace of God” for this work.

Back home in their sending church they gather the believers and report “what great things God had done with them”. And what is the great thing

the Lord has done? That “he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.”
They went out to preach the gospel and came back saying: the Gentiles have believed. Some Jews too, certainly – but the focus is specifically on the Gentiles.
That is the thrust of this entire first missionary journey. They preach in the synagogues everywhere – that is striking in itself – but even more striking is that the Gentiles respond in faith. We shouldn’t underestimate the statement that God “opened the door of faith to the Gentiles”. It is a very strong generalisation, but it accurately describes the situation. The whole of the next chapter is devoted to unpacking what that means.

Acts 15:1–4
1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.
2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.
3 And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.
4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.
We now come to one of the most important events in Acts: the question whether believers should or should not live under the Law. When many Gentiles begin to come to faith, the issue becomes acute. Acts 15 is the account of the so-called “first council” or “apostolic council” in Jerusalem – and it is also the last. It ends with a clear, written decision.
Some men come down from Judaea – from Jerusalem, where the first Christian church had arisen, largely made up of Jewish believers living in a Jewish way. These men insist that the Gentile believers must be circumcised “after the manner of Moses” – that is, that they must keep the Law of Moses – otherwise they cannot be saved.
Here “circumcision” doesn’t just mean the physical rite itself, but stands for the whole life under the Law. To accept circumcision is to place yourself under the Law. Scripture often uses “the circumcision” and “the uncircumcision” (“the foreskin”) this way – for example in Romans 2 – as shorthand for Jew under Law and Gentile outside it. The act itself dates from Abraham, but later was taken up into the Mosaic Law.
You can imagine what happens: especially with Jews involved, serious conflict breaks out. There is “no small dissension and disputation” with Paul and Barnabas. In Jerusalem they don’t have this problem in the same way – they still live under the Jewish Law. But these men from Jerusalem think that believers in Antioch should also keep the Law properly.

So there is a row; then it is decided that Paul and Barnabas, with some others, will go up to Jerusalem to lay the matter before the apostles and elders there.
On the way they travel through Phoenicia (roughly modern Lebanon) and Samaria (the northern part of Canaan), visiting believers and telling them about the conversion of the Gentiles. That is the great, joyful news: Gentiles are coming to faith in large numbers.
Arriving in Jerusalem, they are warmly received by the church, the apostles, and the elders, and again they report “what great things God had done with them” – namely the calling of the Church in our days, out of all nations, Jews and Gentiles alike.
You might almost expect Peter and James and the others in Jerusalem to feel jealous about what God is doing with Paul and Barnabas. And then the issue is raised formally in verse 5.

Acts 15:5–8
5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.
6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.
7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.
8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;
Naturally, the opposition comes from “the sect of the Pharisees” – the most law-observant group among the Jews. You might call them “orthodox” in the sense that they are faithful to the traditional teaching and way of life – which does not mean they are faithful to Scripture.
They are called a “sect”, literally a cut-off branch, a subdivision. The implication is that as long as someone is still a Pharisee – living under the Jewish Law in that way – he is not yet a believer. He still has to become one. And once he does, he should no longer live under that Law. Judaism is religion, not faith. It is either religion or faith; the two are fundamentally different things.
The apostles and elders come together to examine the issue, and, unsurprisingly, there is “much disputing”. Peter then stands up and reminds them that God had chosen him “a good while ago” so that the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel from his mouth and believe. He is referring to the way God used him to open the door to the Gentiles (Acts 10–11). The phrase “a good while ago” points back even beyond that to Matthew 16, where the Lord promised Peter that he would have “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” – that is, of the New Covenant. Peter would open that hidden kingdom; he would be the first to proclaim the New Covenant, but only after Christ’s resurrection.
So the gathering of a Church from among the Gentiles was already implied there in Matthew 16. No one disputes that Peter was the first to bring the

gospel officially to the Gentiles. Paul is then the one who lays out church truth in detail, in his 14 letters (including Hebrews).
And God – “which knoweth the hearts” – bore witness to the Gentiles by giving them the Holy Ghost in exactly the same way as to the Jewish believers.

Acts 15:9–11
9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.
10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?
11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.
Here Peter explicitly puts Jews and Gentiles on the same level. God made no distinction between them; He purified their hearts by faith – which is the very opposite of Law.
Then comes his question: why are you testing God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples – that is, the yoke of the Mosaic Law – which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?
Yet in our day many believers say something like: “You can’t actually bear that yoke, but you can at least try; the Lord wants that and will reward it.” That sounds pious, but biblically it is simply not true.
Peter’s testimony is: we (Jewish believers) believe that we will be saved in the same way as they (the Gentiles) – namely through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, not through the Law. The roles are reversed: the Gentiles now become the example.
The Gentiles never had the Law; it plays no part in their history. So the salvation of the Jew is patterned after that of the Gentile: by grace alone, through faith alone, apart from Law.

Acts 15:12–14
12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.
13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:
14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.
The question has been raised – and now there is no counter-argument. “All the multitude kept silence.” In effect: silence means consent. The controversy is settled; what follows is explanation and confirmation.
They listen to Barnabas and Paul telling of the “great miracles and wonders” God had done among the Gentiles through them. First Peter, then Paul and Barnabas; then James speaks.
James is the leading figure – the “overseer” – of the church at Jerusalem. Galatians 2:12 refers to people who come “from James”. This is, as far as we know, the same James who wrote the epistle of James: not one of the Twelve, but “the Lord’s brother”. Humanly speaking, he would even have

been heir to David's royal line; in any case, he acts as a kind of regent and speaks with authority.
He refers to "Simeon". That is not Simon Peter (who is always called Simon in Acts), but Simeon of Luke 2. Luke – who, as far as we know, has compiled and edited a substantial part of Acts – has already told us about him in his Gospel and can therefore allude to him here.
By revelation of the Holy Spirit, Simeon had been told that he would not see death before he had seen "the Lord's Christ" (Luke 2:26). When he sees the child Jesus, he says: "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Not just "the Saviour", but "thy salvation".
And he adds that this salvation has been "prepared before the face of all peoples; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:31–32). Notice the order: first the Gentiles, then Israel. That is exactly what is at stake in Acts 15.
James says that Simeon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles "to take out of them a people for his name" – not merely "by his name". "For his name" expresses the goal and position: a people belonging to Him, as Israel once was "a peculiar people unto me" (Exodus 19:5), a priestly people. That is precisely what the Church is: a people for His Name.
James then (as the passage goes on) links this with Isaiah 42, 49 and 8, from which we must conclude that it is not about the nations in general, but about the nations descended from the ten tribes of Israel. Out of them God takes a people for His Name in

Acts 15:15–18
15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,
16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up:
17 That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.
18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.
"I will return…" – that "I" is Jehovah. That already implies there is no real difference between Jehovah of the Old Testament and Jesus of the New.
James is saying: when Christ returns, God will again turn His attention to the specifically Jewish side of things – the "tabernacle of David", the Davidic kingdom. In terms of the kingdom and Israel, much still awaits the future, after the nation's conversion to its Messiah.
The quotation in verse 16 is from Amos 9:11–12. There we read that the "residue of men" and "all the Gentiles" will seek the Lord; over them the name of the Lord is called. Here, "the Lord" is the Lord Jesus.
James stresses in verse 18: "Known unto God are all his works from eternity." That plural "works" is important. God is not doing just one thing; He is doing several distinct works:

- a work with regard to the Church,
- a work with Israel,
- a work with the nations,

each in different times, in different groups of people, on different terms and with different purposes.
James' point is: in our present time God is engaged in a different work – not with the Jewish nation as such, but with a people taken out of the Gentiles for His Name.

Acts 15:19–22
19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:
20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.
21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.
22 Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:
In verse 19 James comes to a conclusion. As the Lord's brother he evidently has the role of giving the formal ruling here. He says: "Wherefore my sentence is…" – up to this point there has been input, but no output. Peter has spoken, Paul has spoken, but neither has given a formal verdict. James now does.
His judgement is that believers from among the Gentiles who have turned to God should not be troubled – not harassed with demands to keep the Law. Instead, they should be written to.
This is done very officially – the only time in Acts that such a letter of "how to live" is issued. It is a single letter, precisely because the decision is: there is no law under which you are to live. Once that is clear, you don't need a stream of ethical circulars.
But since there were as yet no New Testament writings, James finds it wise to have something in black and white that can be circulated – especially "where Moses is read", i.e. in the synagogues on the sabbath.
Verse 22 – "then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church…" – has been used over the centuries to justify all sorts of church boards and synods, and also congregational meetings where "the whole church" allegedly decides everything.
But note the flow: verse 6 says the apostles and elders came together to consider the matter. They are the ones gathered to debate and decide. "The whole church" here does not mean every member sitting in assembly government; it means that what the apostles and elders decided was recognised and endorsed by the whole body. They represented the church.
That is not democracy. The Church has only one Head: Christ. Apostles and elders are His delegates. Apostles, in practice, are elders as well. The distinction between the words is not pressed here; they stand together.
So responsible men in Jerusalem now choose ("select from among themselves") suitable brothers to go with Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch to deliver the answer. Those are Judas (surname Barsabas) and Silas, "chief men among the brethren".

“Judas” is the name of the Jewish people (Judah); “Barsabas” means “son of the sabbath” – that pushes you beyond the sabbath, to the first day of the week, which is exactly the ground that is now being taken. “Silas” is essentially the same name as “Saul” – two Greek forms of the Hebrew “Shaul”. And these are “leading men” among the brothers. So we now see:

- apostles,
- elders, and
- leading brothers (those who go in front).

Acts 15:23–27
23 And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:
24 Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:
25 It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,
26 Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
27 We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.
The letter is drafted on behalf of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem and then carried to Antioch by these trusted brothers.
In verse 24 you see the biblical meaning of “soul” in action. Those teachings had “subverted” (upset, shaken) their souls – that is, their daily, practical lives. They were left wondering: must we do this, must we not do that? Are we obliged to keep the Law or not?
So under joint responsibility they send these men to those who have been disturbed by teaching about circumcision and law-keeping – teaching which, they stress, did not have their authorisation.
Judas and Silas are sent so that they can confirm orally the content of the letter. In the ancient world, written material had relatively little weight by itself; someone had to say it. The spoken word carried more authority. Anyone could write something; a written document only “stood” if there were reliable witnesses to speak to it.
Today it is almost the reverse: oral tradition is often dismissed as “legend” and only what is written is treated as “historical”. But something can be historically true even if it is not preserved in writing.
Here we have both: a written decision and men who can personally explain and confirm it.
Then comes the key statement.

Acts 15:28–29a
28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;
29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols…

What we have here is not really a set of prohibitions in the strict sense with divine penalties attached; it is an apostolic recommendation, but one which they explicitly say “seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us”.
So who are we to have a different opinion? They simply align themselves with what God has made known.
The letter says that no greater burden is to be laid on the Gentile believers than “these necessary things” – namely, that they should abstain “from pollutions of idols” (v.20) / “things offered to idols” (v.29), and from blood, from what is strangled, and from fornication.
The same three points appear in both verse 20 and verse 29; and that is all.
Later, in the epistles, you no longer get a repetition of such prohibitions. On the contrary, in 1 Corinthians 8:1 Paul says: “as touching things offered unto idols…” – and he does not repeat “abstain”. In verse 4 he writes: “As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.”
If an idol is nothing, it cannot in itself transfer any real “contamination” to the food. So, in principle, it makes no difference.
The suggestion, in light of 1 Corinthians 8, is that those in Acts 15 who are particularly addressed are people who “until now had an idol habit” – those whose conscience is still conditioned by former idolatry. They should not eat what they themselves regard as idol-food.
1 Corinthians 10:19–20 speaks to the other side:
“What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing?
But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils [demons], and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.”
In practice, sacrifices are made to non-existent gods, but behind that stand real demons. It is to them that people in effect offer. These demons are the “gods of this world”; people serve and even sacrifice to them – but they are not gods.
So Paul’s point is not that the food itself has changed; it is that believers should not participate in an act of worship to demons. One should not first present the food as an offering to a demon and then sit down to eat. That is the principle; not some mystical contamination in the meat as such, especially if it has taken place outside your knowledge.
Other passages, like Romans 14:14, underline this:
“I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.”
Nothing is inherently unclean; but if a person regards something as unclean, then for his conscience it is unclean.
1 Timothy 4 reacts strongly against those who “command to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving”. The principle there is:

“For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving:
For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” (1 Tim. 4:4–5)
We give thanks before eating because thanksgiving sets the food apart to the Lord.
So perhaps, in Acts 15, we should think of people who do regard certain foods as defiled; for them it is better to abstain. And we should remember we are dealing with a mixed company – Jews and Gentiles. For Jews, given their background and conscience, many things are “unclean”. Gentile believers would, in love, take account of that – and vice versa. The wording remains somewhat general on purpose.

Acts 15:29b
29 …and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.
“Blood” and “things strangled” belong together. When an animal is properly slaughtered, the first thing that happens is that its blood is drained. Some people then consume the blood; that is exactly what is here advised against. We are to abstain from blood (Genesis 9 already says this, long before the Law).
If an animal has been strangled, the blood remains in the flesh and does not drain out; so “things strangled” are effectively the same as eating blood. Hence the link.
Scripture associates blood with a creature’s practical life:

- lose your blood, and you lose your life;
- behaviour and lifestyle affect health – and thus, in a sense, the state of the blood.

The picture is: if you eat flesh with the blood in it, you are taking that creature’s “soul” (life) into yourself. Scripture shows that demons can inhabit animals; think of the “legion” of demons in the herd of swine (Luke 8).
From Scripture I would say: in itself, eating animal blood need not be harmful, but it could be contaminated – not by the idol as such, but because demons seek to occupy bodies, and “in the blood” seems the plausible place. One sometimes hears of transplant patients who recall experiences or tastes of a donor; that could well be due to a demon being “transferred” via the body.
So there seems to be a connection between the command to abstain from blood and from what is strangled and the warning about “things offered to idols”. The issue is not the substance itself, but the potential link with demonic activity.
I suspect Genesis 9 directs humanity to eat meat without the blood precisely because eating meat in that way makes us less open to direct demonic influence than we might otherwise be.
Then “fornication” is mentioned. What links these three:

- idol sacrifices,
- blood/strangled meat,
- fornication?

The common factor is demons. All three are classic channels of demonic involvement.
Sexual immorality is not just a physical act; through sexual union more can be transmitted (including demonic influence) than just the obvious. So again, it is a matter of contagion.
This, in my view, is the only coherent explanation that does not contradict other scriptures that say nothing is unclean in itself. The danger does not lie in the material thing, but in the spiritual powers behind it – demons – to which a person can open himself.
Believers are engaged in a spiritual conflict, not “against flesh and blood”, “but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Eph. 6:12)
These powers target us as believers. Acts 15 is, I think, a practical warning against giving them needless opportunities.
And then that lovely ending: “Ye shall do well. Fare ye well.” Short and to the point. That is all they have to say – and all that needs to be said.

Acts 15:30–34
30 So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:
31 Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.
32 And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.
33 And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.
34 Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.
They come back to Antioch, assemble the believers, and read the letter. The reaction is joy – “they rejoiced for the consolation.”
You don’t see that so often nowadays: people rejoicing because they are told they don’t have to keep a law, but may live in freedom. Often people don’t want that freedom; they prefer clear rules so they don’t have to choose. These believers in Antioch, however, did want the freedom of grace.
The pattern here is instructive: where certain truths are known in one place and not in another, the Lord sends people to carry that light. That is how it usually works.
Judas and Silas stay “a time” in Antioch, strengthening and encouraging the believers, and then their task is finished. Judas returns to Jerusalem; Silas decides to remain in Antioch for a while. Later he travels on. He has come from Jerusalem to Antioch, and in the next chapter he joins Saul – his namesake – on Paul’s second missionary journey.
This is how the Word spread: not by God sending prophets or angels in some mystical way, but by ordinary men travelling the world, preaching the gospel. And that is how it has continued right up to our own day.

Acts 15:35–41
35 Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

36 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.
37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.
38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.
39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;
40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.
41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.
With Paul and Barnabas it had all begun, on that first missionary journey, with all those Gentiles coming to faith. They now stay on in Antioch, teaching and preaching “the word of the Lord”, together with many others.
Out of this the second missionary journey arises. Paul suggests to Barnabas that they revisit the cities where they had preached, to see how the believers are doing.
Barnabas wants to take John Mark again. Paul refuses: Mark had abandoned them in Pamphylia on the first journey. That was particularly awkward because Mark was Barnabas’ nephew. Family ties and spiritual judgement collide; there is sharp disagreement, and they part company. Barnabas sails with Mark to Cyprus – his home island – and after this we no longer hear of Barnabas in Acts.
What lies behind this, typologically? Barnabas’ original name was Joses (Joseph), later changed to Barnabas. In Scripture, everyone called Joseph either gets a new name or disappears from the stage. Joseph appears briefly in a key role, decisive for the later course of events, but then he is forgotten. Think of the Joseph in Genesis who is forgotten by Pharaoh’s butler (Gen. 40:23).
Joses/Barnabas fits that pattern. Joseph is the personal type of the birthright – the right of the firstborn. The point of that birthright, in God’s plan, is that it is always forgotten for a time, hidden from view. At the end of Genesis you know Joseph holds the birthright, but you don’t see how that then works out. It is as though God intentionally lets it sink from sight, because it belongs to the parts of His plan that are not disclosed in advance.
From now on Acts follows Paul, together with Silas. We leave Barnabas (Joses/Joseph) out of sight, in line with that typology, and trace the further progress of the gospel among the nations.

Acts 16:1–3
1 Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek:
2 Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.

3 Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.
We now follow Paul together with Silas.
Paul quite possibly goes deliberately straight to Lystra in particular, in order to “pick up” the relatively young Timothy, who already had a good reputation among the believers. “Timotheus” means “to the honour of God”.
Paul effectively says to Eunice, Timothy’s mother (compare 2 Timothy 1:5): “Give me the lad, this disciple – a follower, a learner – and let him come with me so he can learn the ‘trade’ by my side.” It is a specific ministry that must be learned.
Paul chooses Timothy and wants to train him for the overseer’s work (see 1 Timothy 3:1). The appointment of elders and leaders is something that happens from above – ultimately by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28), not by voting from below.
About Timothy it is said:
“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Tim. 3:15)
The Word of God had been poured into him from infancy. If you want to learn a “trade” well, the best way is to grow up in it from childhood.
Timothy was the son of a believing Jewish woman – so a Christian – and a Greek father. He was uncircumcised, and therefore, by Jewish standards, not a Jew.
Paul circumcises Timothy – not because it was required, nor because the Lord demanded it, but “because of the Jews” in that region. Did the Jews have the right to demand this? No. They had no right at all. But in practice, if Timothy, as an uncircumcised man, tried to address religious Jews, he would have found little or no hearing.
If they asked him, “Are you circumcised?”, he could now simply answer, “Yes, I am,” and that ended the discussion.
In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul explains that he did this from purely practical motives, to “win” the Jews for the gospel of the grace of God. For practical reasons you may sometimes make concessions – but never in the message itself.
From Galatians 2 it is clear that this was not the standard practice for co-workers. A believer does not live under the Law. On the way towards the “apostolic council” (Acts 15), Titus was with Paul. Galatians 2:3 says:
“But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.”
So Timothy’s circumcision was an exception, for tactical reasons among the Jews, not a rule.

Acts 16:4–12
4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.

5 And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.
6 Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia,
7 After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.
8 And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas.
9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.
10 And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.
11 Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis;
12 And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.
The “decrees for to keep” obviously include that Gentile believers do not have to be circumcised and are not to live under the Law. As they travelled from city to city, they passed on these decisions of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.
The result: the churches were established (made firm) in the faith and stood in Christian liberty. And the fruit of that was that the churches “increased in number daily” – they grew.
Whether Paul and his companions at the time themselves understood that it was the Holy Spirit who hindered them from preaching the Word in Asia, I rather doubt. The text does not say they knew it then; it is clearly a report afterwards. Looking back, they recognised that it had been the Spirit who had blocked their way.
They then tried another route, but again the Spirit “did not allow” it. Things kept closing off until they reached the end of the peninsula – what we call Asia Minor – at Troas.
Troas is (rightly) associated with ancient Troy. From there, Macedonia lies on the other side of the water, in the north of what is now Greece.
When you can’t go any further, and the Lord then gives some indication – in this case a vision of a man of Macedonia – that there is ministry to be done there, you draw the conclusion: then we must go to Macedonia.
So they board ship and sail from Troas to the island of Samothrace (Samothracia). Normally we would think: what does that stopover matter? They only stay a night and continue next day to Neapolis (“New City”) on the mainland. Why mention the island at all?
The commentary sees a typological line here:

- From Troas/Troy (linked in some traditions with Israel and even more specifically with Judah and later with Britain),
- via the island of Samothrace (as a picture of the British Isles),
- to Neapolis on the coast,
- and then inland to Philippi, a Roman colony.

Historically: Philippi is named after Philip, father of Alexander the Great, who founded the greatest world empire of its day – the Greek empire.

Philippi thus stands as an expression of the Greco-Roman world, right up to our own times.
Neapolis, the “new city”, is the “front town” of Philippi, and “polis” in Greek is not just “city” but also civilisation, society, culture. You have here a new world, and we are still living in that same world – the world in which the Lord Jesus appeared.
It is the world God has let go (given up), yet also the world in which the ten tribes are scattered and in which the gospel goes out.

Acts 16:13–15
13 And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.
14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.
15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.
They go to the place outside the city where people gathered for prayer. But it is a group of women. Where are the men?
What is missing is ten men. Among the Jews the rule is: if there are not at least ten men, you cannot have a synagogue. No one can really explain why ten, but the thought is: the ten tribes are missing, so you do not have “Israel” as such. Ten are “lost”.
The Word of God – the “ten words” – are ultimately entrusted to the ten tribes, and among them the true fruit would be found. But here, they are absent. Instead of a synagogue, there are women at the riverside. That already points to a lack within Judaism.
Lydia, from Thyatira, hears the message, believes, and is baptised – she “attends to the things that were spoken of Paul”. She then says, “that I have been found faithful to the Lord.” In the underlying thought, “faithful” is the same word as “believing”: Lydia is a picture of the ten tribes in a positive sense – she hears the gospel and believes it.
Lydia is linked etymologically to “Lidda” and so to “Lod” – a place name which is synonymous with “Perez” (breach) – a “break” or “gap”. This is, in the Bible, a picture of the present dispensation: the breach in salvation history where God has interrupted His public dealings with Israel and the nations in order to resume them later. It is the gap between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel.
Lydia is a seller of purple. Purple (a mixture of blue and red) is the colour of the mediator and of the High Priest.

- Blue is the colour of heaven, the heavenly things.
- Red is the colour of the earth – adamah, “Adam”, “red earth”.

Purple brings together the blue of heaven and the red of the earth, and thus speaks of the Mediator who brings God and man together: Christ. It is therefore the colour of Christ and of the New Covenant, in which man is reconciled to God through the one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.

This seller of purple, representing the “breach” (this present interruption), insists that Paul and Silas come into her house and stay there. That is where the gospel lodges.
So, in the typology the commentary follows, the gospel “lands” with the Britons, especially the Anglo-Saxon peoples.

Acts 16:16–18
16 And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying:
17 The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.
18 And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.
The phrase translated “spirit of divination” is literally a python-spirit – a reference to the python in the pagan stories about Apollo. Apollo (“Pythius”) is the one who kills the python; in the typology he is taken as a picture of Christ defeating the serpent.
Scripture also presents Christ as the serpent lifted up:

- The serpent in the wilderness (Numbers 21),
- Applied to Christ in John 3:14: “as Moses lifted up the serpent… so must the Son of man be lifted up.”

The medical symbol – the serpent on a staff (the aesculapius) – is often traced to Greek mythology, but in essence it is the same thought: the lifted-up serpent as a sign of healing, a type of Christ.
In the Bible, the serpent is not so much a picture of someone as of a principle: Satan is at present the ruler of the material, visible world. But he will be defeated and replaced by the Lord Jesus Christ. The “old serpent” (Revelation 12:9; 20:2) will give way to the exalted Serpent, Christ.
This python-spirit controls the girl. Women, by their nature, are often more receptive, more open, and thus more easily used by the devil than men (compare 1 Corinthians 11:14; and the Eve/Adam pattern).
She is a picture of the nations; more specifically, as a nameless slave girl, a picture of the ten tribes in their first great westward migration – the Celts, already long dwelling in Western Europe, especially Britain.
They were idolaters even while in the land of Israel, but historically they proved quite receptive to the gospel. On the level of government (Celtic royalty), many came to faith, and the old pagan customs disappeared.
That is captured here in this slave girl: she recognises the biblical message, and idolatry gives way to the Word of God.
On the surface, what the spirit shouts sounds absolutely right:
“These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.”
So what is wrong with it? Paul is clearly not happy. Eventually he turns and casts the spirit out.
Why?
Because God has let the world go, and into that darkness the Word of God comes. The devil tries either to suppress that Word or to divert it. One

method is to pose as a Christian, to use biblical language, but then to drag the whole thing onto a side track.
If he cannot stop people coming to the truth, he will try to throw them out of the bend. He first seems to agree, to “join” the work, and then tries to take it over. “If you can’t beat them, join them.”
That is why Scripture warns about “the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11), and Paul says: “we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11).
It is quite unnecessary for a demon to shout publicly what these men are; if they are servants of the Most High God, they themselves will preach the way of salvation – and that is enough.
We are told to “test the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1). There is also “the spirit of antichrist”.
The only safeguard is to hold fast to the Word, for that is what the Spirit uses. The Spirit leads us into all the truth through the Scriptures. If a “spirit” tells us that He Himself is now speaking directly beyond or apart from the Bible, that is not the Spirit of God but a demon.
Paul therefore turns round, has no peace with this spirit, and commands it to go out “in the name of Jesus Christ”. When that Name is mentioned, demons are stirred – but they must also leave.
No wonder preaching that Name can cause uproar. Demons protest loudly – sometimes by violent opposition, sometimes by flattering agreement. But in the end the enemy is trying to seize control.
Once the spirit is expelled, the idolatry and its apparatus disappear, and there is peace: she now serves not the devil and his staff, but the Lord, through the Word of the Lord.

Acts 16:19–25
19 And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers,
20 And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city,
21 And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.
22 And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them.
23 And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely:
24 Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.
25 And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.
Once the girl’s owners see that their “hope of profit” is gone, they seize Paul and Silas and drag them to the marketplace before the authorities. Their accusation essentially comes down to this: “They are Jews, and they’re turning the city upside down.” Merely holding rigidly to their own Jewish way of life is seen as a threat. It clashes with a city that lives under Roman law and honours Roman (Greek) gods.

In the New Testament, being “Jewish” is no longer primarily a matter of bloodline but of adherence to the Jewish religion.
Is the Church “Jewish”? The Romans seem to assume so – “these men, being Jews…”. The answer, however, is no. On essential points Christianity is the very opposite of Judaism:

- Not law, but grace;
- Not temple and sacrifices, but Christ and His one sacrifice.

So Christianity is not “Jewish” religiously, nor ethnically.
Paul and Silas are thrown into the deepest part of the prison, their feet fast in the stocks. It is dark – and darkness confines. When you cannot see, your world shrinks to what you can touch; darkness is a prison.
There, in that darkness and captivity, we find the prisoners together with Paul and Silas – and they sing hymns to God.
This is a picture of the Church: a company of prisoners, but prisoners of Christ Jesus (compare Ephesians 4:8 and Paul’s references to himself as “prisoner of Jesus Christ”).
What does the Church do? It sings praises. The “heavenly host praising God” at the Lord’s birth (Luke 2:13–14) is a picture of the Church. At His return He comes with His saints, His heavenly armies – that is us.

Acts 16:26–31
26 And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one’s bands were loosed.
27 And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.
28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.
29 Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,
30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?
31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.
We have seen this sort of deliverance before: in Acts 4, Peter and John are also freed from prison by an angel. God had already promised in the Old Testament that when the Messiah comes He will proclaim liberty to the captives and set prisoners free.
Here, a great earthquake shakes the foundations of the prison; all the doors open, everyone’s chains fall off.
The jailer, waking up and seeing the doors open, assumes the prisoners have escaped. As a Roman jailer he is personally responsible and will pay with his life, so he draws his sword to kill himself.
Paul shouts: “Do thyself no harm; for we are all here.”
The jailer calls for lights, rushes in, trembling, falls down before Paul and Silas, and asks the great question:
“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”
The answer is beautifully short and simple:

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”
This verse is often misused, as though it taught that if the father believes, the whole household is automatically saved because of his faith. But that is not what it says. The sense is that he and his household will be saved on the same basis – namely, by believing.
In the wider symbolic reading, the “house” is the whole prison-organisation for which he is responsible – all under his authority.
Theologically: salvation has always been on the basis of faith. God counts faith as righteousness. That is already said in Genesis 15:6 about Abraham: he “believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” This is explained in Romans 4 and Galatians 3.
What did Abraham believe? In essence, he believed in resurrection – particularly in relation to his seed, which is Christ (Gal. 3:16).
We believe that “Jesus is the Christ”: “that same Jesus whom ye have crucified” (Acts 2:36) is made Lord and Christ by God. Faith in this risen Christ is counted for righteousness.

Acts 16:32–34
32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.
33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.
34 And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.
Paul and Silas speak “the word of the Lord” to the jailer and to all who belong to his household and come under his authority.
In that same hour of the night he washes their wounds – and he himself is immediately baptised, and all his – that is, all who, like him, believed.
There is no long catechism class beforehand; he confesses his faith simply by being baptised.
He then brings them into his house, sets food before them, and rejoices that he has become a believer in God “with all his house”.
In the typology followed by the commentary: this jailer, as head over the prison, represents the king of the ten tribes in captivity. He is seen as Caradoc (Caractacus), a British leader who, according to some historical reconstructions, was taken as a prisoner to Rome and lived under house arrest in the emperor’s palace – and, in that setting, came to faith.
Whether or not one accepts all those historical identifications, the picture is this:

- The head of a house (or of a people) comes to faith.
- In him, his whole “house” is represented.

The prison itself is the same sort of picture as Joseph’s prison in Genesis. When Joseph arrives, the prisoners were already there; under Joseph it becomes orderly and peaceful. Joseph and his prison are a type of the ten tribes in captivity.
Here, Paul and Silas come into that “prison”, and the whole house comes to faith – the jailer first, as the head.

The table they sit at together is the table of fellowship, the Lord's table (1 Corinthians 10:21), which is the only "symbol" Christians still have after baptism. The Lord's Supper is the visible expression of the fellowship and unity of the Church; all sit at one table, feeding on the same provision of life.
If the jailer is seen as a king, then "all his house" are his people. That is the principle:

- A king represents his people before God and before the world.
- The people are judged and treated in connection with their king.

Likewise, the Lord Jesus, as King and "Son of Man", is the representative of His whole people and of mankind. He could pay the debt for all, because He stands legally for all.
So, in the picture: a king of the ten tribes, in exile, comes under the gospel, believes, and thus his whole "house" is brought into the sphere of the faith. This is taken as a picture of how the gospel came to the British royal house – and via that line to the ten tribes, whose throne it is said to be.
Whatever one makes of the historical details, the spiritual line is clear:

- A captive people,
- its head enlightened by the gospel,
- a house believing, baptised, and rejoicing around one table in fellowship with God.

Acts 16 : 35–40
35 And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go.
36 And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace.
37 But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out.
38 And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans.
39 And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city.
40 And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.
Although Paul was a Jew, he was also a Roman citizen. When the jailer informed him that they could now be released and should "go in peace", Paul refused. He insisted that they could not simply send them away quietly after having beaten them publicly, without trial, and thrown them into prison. As Roman citizens they had legal protections. A Roman could not be scourged without formal judgment, and this was widely understood. Paul appeals to those rights. He acknowledges his Jewish background, but makes no claim to the Jewish religion; his identity is not rooted in Judaism but in Christ.

Acts 17

Paul was ultimately escorted out of Philippi with a form of official vindication—recognised as a Roman citizen rather than as a guilty troublemaker. From there he travelled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, arriving at Thessalonica. As always, the narrative continues in its familiar pattern: the apostle visits the synagogue first.

Acts 17 : 1–4
1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:
2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,
3 Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.
4 And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.
Paul expounded the Scriptures because they must be “opened” in order to open the heart and mind (cf. Luke 24). His preaching came from the Old Testament—it is not a straightforward task, because nowhere does the Old Testament plainly state that “the Christ must suffer”. These truths are there, but in veiled form; they are part of God’s hidden counsel and later clarified in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus Himself explained this to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, beginning with Moses and the prophets.
The heart of the gospel, and of all biblical revelation, is death and resurrection. Paul shows this from Scripture.
The text says “some of them believed”, which would more accurately read “some of them were persuaded.” First came persuasion from Scripture, and then faith. Those persuaded joined Paul and Silas—essentially joining the Church of Christ. From the Jews only a few believed; from the Gentiles, a great number. Thessalonica also had many influential women, and their faith is noted as significant.

Acts 17 : 5–11
5 But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.
6 And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;
7 Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.
8 And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.
9 And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.
10 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.

11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.
Those Jews who refused the gospel—who were unconvinced—became jealous. Jealousy leads directly to anger and bitterness. Seeing Gentiles come to faith filled them with resentment, and they opposed Paul's message. It became the sin of contradiction, the constant counter-speaking of God's word.
A riot was stirred up by means of rough men from the marketplace, but instigated by the Jews. They attacked the house of Jason—whose name corresponds to Joshua or Jesus (Hebrew: Jehoshua)—implying that Paul and Silas had been sheltered there. They accused them of defying Caesar by introducing another King—Jesus. Paul hardly ever presents Jesus as "King" in Acts or in his letters; he rarely speaks about the Kingdom of God in those terms. But his proclamation of Jesus as the divinely appointed Judge of all implies an authority higher than Caesar. The Jews understood this implication, hence their accusation.
"Security" or "satisfaction" appears to be a form of bail. Jason and the others paid a guarantee to prevent further unrest. This may explain why Paul and Silas were sent away: if they remained and another riot occurred, Jason's bond would be forfeited. Later Paul writes that he desired to return to Thessalonica, but that Satan hindered him (1 Thess. 2:18)—commonly understood in light of this security arrangement.
In Berea, events take a very different turn. There the Jews are called "more noble", because they received the word willingly and examined the Scriptures daily. They inclined themselves toward the truth—"neigen" means to bend or bow. The noble-minded are those who test everything by the Word.

Acts 17 : 12–14
12 Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.
13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.
14 And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.
In Thessalonica only "some" believed; in Berea "many" did. The same expression appears as in verse 4, but with the opposite effect. The key difference: Berea received and examined Scripture; Thessalonica resisted it.
Here we glimpse how faith among Jewish believers and among the Ten Tribes (as the author interprets them), together with Gentiles, is portrayed as "honourable women"—those who, having strayed, now serve the Lord. Thessalonica becomes a picture of the Jewish nation as a whole: this reaction appears wherever the gospel is preached among the Jews. Berea stands as an exception. The name is linked to "Heber", from which we derive "Hebrew"—"those from the other side." Berea thus symbolises the true people of God: those who love the Word and test all things by it.

Thessalonica receives apostolic letters; Berea does not—apparently because they required no further correction. Daily Scripture study was enough.
The same pattern repeats: the Thessalonian Jews arrive, stir up the crowd, and Paul is sent away for safety. Silas and Timothy remain, as before.

Acts 17 : 15–21
15 And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.
16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.
17 Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.
18 Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him…
Paul arrived alone in Athens. Surprisingly to modern readers, Athens was profoundly religious. Philosophy and religion are two expressions of the same impulse: both seek meaning; philosophy asks the questions, religion claims the answers. Seeing the city full of idols provoked Paul's spirit—he was deeply troubled, because idolatry in Scripture is linked to demons. Once again he began in the synagogue, then spoke with religious Gentiles, and then addressed whoever he encountered in the marketplace. Philosophical debate followed: Epicureans and Stoics confronted him. The word translated "babbler" (spermologos) literally means "seed-picker"—someone who picks up scraps of knowledge and pretends expertise. Others accused Paul of introducing foreign gods because he preached "Jesus and the resurrection".
He was taken to the Areopagus—the council seated on the rocky hill dedicated to Mars, a symbol of war and, in biblical terms, of Satan. On a level below the summit were rock-hewn seats for the council: strikingly like an image of the Church founded upon the Rock. Paul, the pattern for believers, stands there before the highest court of Greek wisdom. Athenians were absorbed with novelty. They spent their days on new ideas, constantly hearing and speaking about "something new." They were willing to listen—as long as it was intellectually interesting.

Acts 17 : 22–26
22 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.
23 …To the Unknown God. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.
24 God that made the world and all things therein… dwelleth not in temples made with hands;
25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing…
26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men…
The inscription "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD" shows their concern that some deity might have been overlooked. Paul identifies this "unknown" God as

the God of Scripture—the God who hides Himself from the world. He makes Himself known only to those who seek Him.
God created the whole cosmos and is Master of heaven and earth. He cannot be confined to human temples. Solomon said this at the dedication of the Temple: God does not live in the building made with human hands. Paul repeats the same truth: God is above the temple—higher than religious systems.
Nor does God need anything from us. He is not served as though He required something. Instead, He gives life, breath, and all things. This echoes Greek poetry (likely Aratus): humanity receives everything from God.
All humanity comes from one—Adam. God set the boundaries of nations and the appointed times in history. He determined the places where people would live. Human beings do not need to redraw these boundaries; God has already done so. Their true business is to seek Him.

Acts 17 : 27–28
27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:
28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.
Here lies Scripture's answer to philosophy's central question: Why are we here? We exist to seek the Lord.
The Epicureans pursued happiness; the Stoics pursued virtue and indifference to circumstance. Both grasp at fragments of truth, but neither holds the centre. Man is blind and "gropes"—yet if he seeks God honestly, God will allow Himself to be found. Even though "none seeks God" (Romans 3:11), a sincere pursuit of truth and righteousness will lead to Him. That is the lesson of Christ healing the blind.
Paul quotes Greek poets: "In Him we live and move and exist." All creation is upheld by God. The world does not collapse because He sustains it. God is Father—but mankind has estranged itself from Him. To become true children again we must be born anew under the New Covenant; He then equips and sanctifies us for His service.
1 Corinthians 3 : 4–9
4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?
5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?
6 I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.
7 So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.
8 Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.
9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.
If people ask you about your faith and you reply by naming your denomination, you are actually admitting you are still "carnal", not spiritual. You are behaving as a "babe in Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:1). That's

exactly what was happening at Corinth:
“Are we really like that?” they would say.
“Yes,” Paul answers, “because when one of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another says, ‘I am of Apollos,’ and you label your own party, your own ‘sect’ (literally: your own section), then you are carnal.”
I can’t help it, Paul says in effect, it’s simply what Scripture says.
He then brings it down to size: “Who is Paul? And who is Apollos?” They are just servants through whom you believed. And even that only happened “as the Lord gave to every man.” These servants are gifts from the Lord; we belong only to the Lord Jesus Christ. We are members of His Body, because He has made us members of it.
Paul may have planted, and Apollos may have watered afterwards, but it was God who gave the growth. There is “staff”, as it were – that’s all of us. We are “God’s fellow-workers”. Not that we work next to God as equals, but that we are co-workers in His service.
The Church is not the field of Paul, Apollos or Peter; it is God’s field. “You are God’s field, God’s building.” That has not changed. There is only one field, one building – the “temple of the Holy Ghost,” which Paul speaks of in the next part of this chapter. Paul, Apollos and Peter will each have had their own style, their own way of expressing and approaching the truth, but they were all simply servants of the one and same Lord.

Acts 19 : 1–8
1 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,
2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.
3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John’s baptism.
4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.
5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.
7 And all the men were about twelve.
8 And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.
In Ephesus Paul meets people who are believers, yet who haven’t even heard that there is a Holy Spirit. And still, they had received Him; they just didn’t know it. Paul explains this to them and it is demonstrated outwardly when they begin to speak in languages and to prophesy.
Luke mentions that there were about twelve men. That makes you think: in Acts 2 it also begins with twelve men who start speaking in other tongues. There, they are Jews; here we are in a Gentile environment. That is likely why the story “restarts” in this way, why tongues and healings

suddenly feature again – we've not seen much of that for several chapters. These things were nowhere near as common as many imagine; such manifestations are linked to particular moments. Scripture only records them a handful of times, and that is deliberate.
God was bearing witness "with signs and wonders and diverse miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost" (Hebrews 2:4), and that, crucially, "according to His will." Some people seem to think they can impose their will on God and more or less force Him to work miracles. Scripture is crystal clear: that is not how it works.
Here, as in Acts 2, we meet the word "boldly" again. Peter spoke boldly then; here Paul speaks boldly for three months, "disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God." The word for "persuading" has a legal flavour: "advising" in the sense of legal counsel. Court is "the council"; the advocate gives "counsel". The argument is based on what is written, above all on the Law. You may assume that Paul explained the matters of the Kingdom of God from Old Testament passages.
Once again, Paul is in the synagogue, speaking freely and boldly, just like Peter at Pentecost. And once again, the Jews won't have it, and Paul moves on – one door further, as in Corinth and Antioch. This pattern repeats right through to Acts 28.
Paul will have pointed them to the Word of God and the promises of God. That "three months" fits that: the number 3 is often associated with God's testimony and with the Word. He urges them to embrace "the things of the Kingdom of God". That, in this context, concerns the Church. People like to push the Kingdom of God off into the future, but it already exists; we already belong to it. What the Jews needed to understand regarding the earthly aspect of the Kingdom was that, for now, it is hidden. The King is already crowned with glory and honour (Hebrews 2:7,9), but Israel still clings to "Saul" – the reign of the Law. Only when Saul dies does David become king. In the same way, when Israel lets go of the Law, they will recognise the already-installed King. The Kingdom is real; there is a King; therefore there is a Kingdom. Paul is directing the Jews' attention there.

Acts 19 : 9–10
9 But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.
10 And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.
"Hardening" is a classic Old Testament term: the blinding and hardening of the senses, especially of the heart. Isaiah 6 is the key passage, often quoted in the New Testament. These Jews were already hard when they heard the Word, but they became disobedient by refusing that Word. They would not "give ear". They even began publicly to speak evil of "the Way".
"The Way of the Lord" is God's own route, His path through history. In the Old Testament it is already announced when the "voice crying in the wilderness" is introduced: "Prepare ye the way of the LORD" (Isaiah 40:3). That Way is a particular path, with what looks to us like a very strange

detour: in our days God’s plan runs via the Gentiles. That will later be summarised briefly in Acts 28.
Because they spoke evil of that Way, Paul leaves, taking the disciples with him. There is a split out of the synagogue. From then on he is “disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.” It is now no longer the synagogue but a lecture hall.
This went on for two years. That “two” is not accidental. It calls to mind Jacob’s 20 years with Laban, the 2000 cubits distance between Israel and the priests carrying the ark at the Jordan, and Paul’s two full years in his own hired house at the end of Acts. “Two” pictures our present age in which the Kingdom is hidden, and in which “both Jews and Greeks” hear “the word of the Lord Jesus” – roughly 2000 years from Christ’s resurrection to the close of Daniel’s seventieth week.

Acts 19 : 11–14
11 And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul:
12 So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.
13 Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.
14 And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so.
These were unusual miracles – that’s what the text says. So by definition they were not the norm. Something similar happened with Peter (Acts 5:15). These too are signs.
They echo the story of the woman with the issue of blood who touched the hem of Jesus’ garment (Luke 8). The Lord was not actively doing something; she touched the fringe, was healed, and He simply said, “Power has gone out from Me.” Who did that woman represent? That story is about two women whose histories overlap.
Jairus’ daughter, twelve years old, is ill and dies. On the way to her, without the Lord hurrying in the slightest, this other woman touches Him. She has had a flow of blood for twelve years. The two stories are interwoven. The woman with the blood issue should have become fertile at twelve; instead, her condition made her infertile. Jairus’ daughter reaches the age of fertility and dies. At the same moment this older woman (around 24) is healed and becomes fertile; Jairus’ daughter is later raised. They in effect swap places.
Jairus (“light-bringer”; corresponding to Aaron in Hebrew), ruler of the synagogue, and his daughter are a picture of the Jewish people. Just when Israel should have become fruitful, it became spiritually “dead”. At the same time the other woman – a picture of the Ten Tribes – is healed and becomes fruitful. Though it is not spelt out, she must then have a son: he is a picture of the Church. After that, the daughter of Jairus is raised – pointing to the future restoration of the Jewish nation.

In Acts 19 Paul is a type of Christ, and the healing power flowing from cloths that touched him is a sign of Christ's present work. All these New Testament miracles are pictures of His current, unseen ministry.
Then we meet Jewish exorcists trying to use the Name of Jesus as a kind of tool. They attempt to manipulate evil spirits "in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches." That is a vain – empty – use of the Name, brought in to support the existing Jewish religious system. But when people are truly delivered from the Law, they are also delivered from "the prince of this world" and "the evil one." Through the Law the devil holds the world in his grip, using plenty of staff – "evil spirits," demons.
The devil is a deeply religious being. If you go looking for him, you will find him in religion – any religion. It doesn't matter to him which one, as long as people do not follow the truth. That is what is illustrated here.
The seven sons of Sceva – seven, a complete number – picture Judaism as a whole. Sceva is called a "chief priest," normally a title for those who sat in the Sanhedrin. Here in Ephesus, of course, that's not literally the case, but he evidently held some leading priestly role. The point stands: the Jewish people under the Law stood directly under the influence of evil spirits.

Acts 19:15–20
15 And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?
16 And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.
17 And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.
18 And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds.
19 Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.
20 So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.
The evil spirit spoke through the tongue, the mouth, the throat, and the lips of the man in whom that spirit dwelt. It becomes clear that this one man was stronger than the seven. The seven could not overcome him. They said, "in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches." They had understood that demons flee before the Name of Jesus. We have seen that previously as well, with Simon the sorcerer in relation to Peter (Acts 13). Now we encounter a similar story: others begin using the Name of Jesus in order to cast out spirits. But this evil spirit does not leave. The seven sons of the Jewish high priest are beaten by that one demon.
This became known among both Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus. In any case, the matter was regarded as something that brought honour to God. Those people had served idols there; they had involved themselves with them in one way or another. In earlier times this was called "spiritism." Today it is called "spirituality." Spiritism is idolatry. People appeal to the gods, the spirits — but these are demons. They are held in high esteem

and promoted to the level of gods. That is what these people had been engaged with.
Apparently, books had been written about it in great number. Then, publicly, they renounced it in a decisive manner. They broke with the past. Burning the books meant destroying a culture. Everyone was aware of it, and they “counted the value of them.” One may assume it was a large amount of money. It was not only the destruction of capital, but also the eradication of knowledge. And it is good that this kind of knowledge disappears. You are better off not having it. You can develop “a conscience of the idol” from it, and that becomes a burden to you (1 Corinthians 8:7). What is illustrated here is that people come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
When the Name of Jesus is misused, the whole attempt backfires dramatically (as Acts itself goes on to show). It is not a matter of “technique”; the issue is whether one has truly turned from idols and from religious self-effort to the living God. In Ephesus this eventually leads to believers breaking radically with their occult and idolatrous past – even at high financial cost – burning their magic books. They are, as 1 Thessalonians 1:9 puts it, “turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God.”
The Jews on the other hand did not want to break with their religious past. Hence the sharp contrast. But the Word of the Lord “grew mightily and prevailed” in Ephesus – also over the activity of evil spirits. The two years Paul spent there were not wasted: the Ephesian letter later lays out the position of the Church in the most systematic and profound way in the New Testament. Ephesus becomes the model for our present dispensation.

Acts 19 : 21–27
21 After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.
22 So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season.
23 And the same time there arose no small stir about that way.
24 For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen;
25 Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.
26 Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands:
27 So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.
Here we are told Paul’s travel plans. He intends to go through Macedonia and Achaia – together we’d simply call that Greece – then on to Jerusalem and, after that, to “see” Rome. “To see” in this sort of context means to

have fellowship, to visit, not just to look at. We still speak that way: “I’m going to see so-and-so.”
Timothy and Erastus are sent ahead to Macedonia while Paul remains a while in Asia. At that point a serious uproar breaks out “about that Way” – the same Way mentioned in verse 9 – and about the financial interests tied up with it.
Demetrius, a silversmith, made little silver models of the temple of Diana. His name means “devoted to Demeter”, the goddess of fertility, whom the Romans called Ceres. She was often identified with Diana, goddess of the hunt. Whether it’s fertility or the hunt, it’s all about gain. In Latinised form “Demetrius” corresponds to Diana in Greek: the name is deeply tied to that cult.
The great temple of Diana was in Ephesus. There was a lot of religious tourism – pilgrimages, you could say – to promote hunting success or fertility. And of course, if you’d been to Ephesus, you couldn’t come home without a souvenir: a silver model of her temple. That was good business, as Demetrius well knew. He led the guild of silversmiths who made these shrines.
Now their business model was under threat. Demetrius gathers the craftsmen and lays out the situation. Paul is going around insisting “that they are no gods which are made with hands,” and people all over Asia are listening. Fewer tourists, fewer shrines sold.
At first he speaks quite openly about profit: “You know that by this craft we have our wealth.” But then the whole thing takes on a highly religious tone. Suddenly it’s all about the honour of the goddess and the dignity of her great temple. In reality it is about religion and money – a combination which remains deadly for Christianity as well.
The real concern is not the truth, but income and status. Whenever the work “for the Lord” becomes a business that has to be maintained because people’s livelihoods depend on it, you are on the wrong track. That is one of the great problems with ecclesiastical institutions. I would say they are unbiblical and unnecessary. Not forbidden, but dangerous. Apart from confusing these institutions with the true Church, they inevitably become an “economic person”, a legal entity. And like any person, a legal person instinctively tries to preserve itself – often for no higher goal than sheer self-preservation. Once such a structure exists, you almost never get rid of it.

Acts 19 : 28–34
28 And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.
29 And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul’s companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.
30 And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not.
31 And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre.
32 Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly

was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.
33 And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people.
34 But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.
What follows is mass hysteria. People don't even know what the issue is any more; they are simply whipped up. The whole city pours into the theatre in uproar. Most of them have no idea why they are there. They just shout and drive the frenzy higher.
The disciples see how dangerous this is and will not let Paul go in. They are concerned first and foremost for his safety. But Paul is exactly the sort of man who wants to go where the crowd is largest.
There is nothing but shouting in the theatre. Luke's account is almost comical in its chaos. The Jews then see an opportunity: perhaps they can use this huge gathering to their own advantage. They push Alexander forward to speak. That proves to be a bad idea. As soon as the crowd realise he is a Jew, they don't want to listen. A Jew is hardly going to be a friend of Diana either. Perhaps the idea was that the Jews could harness this anti-Christian riot to stir up more hatred against the believers – as they had often done in other cities. This time it backfires.
Instead of any reasoned speech, the crowd just shouts for about two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" At heart the conflict is "religious", but it is not genuinely about Diana, Judaism, or Christianity. It is about business, trade, and power. The gospel undermines all three. It calls to humility, service and submission, to living from the Lord's hand – a very different thing from economic calculations, marketing and religious "brand management", which people now try to apply in church circles as well.

Acts 19 : 35–40
35 And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?
36 Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly.
37 For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.
38 Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another.
39 But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly.
40 For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.

Alexander never gets to speak. Instead the town clerk – the city's chief administrator, and likely a seasoned politician – manages to calm the crowd.
He appeals to what everyone "knows": Ephesus is the guardian ("temple-keeper") of the great goddess Diana and of the image that "fell down from heaven." If something has fallen from heaven, it must be sacred, so the reasoning goes. The official explanation is that it was not the statue itself, but a meteorite that fell and was then carved into that image.
He claims these things are "beyond dispute" and therefore the crowd should quieten down and do nothing rash. He points out that the men dragged in – Gaius and Aristarchus – are neither temple-robbers nor blasphemers of the goddess. Strictly speaking, that is doubtful: they do preach that there is only one God, which is indeed an insult to Diana. But as long as they don't name her directly, a politician can conveniently say, "They're not attacking our goddess."
If Demetrius and his guild have a concrete legal grievance, the clerk says, the courts are available. Let them use the normal legal channels and accuse one another properly. Anything else should be handled in a lawful assembly. He is worried that Rome will intervene. This is Asia Minor, but it is still the Roman Empire, and Roman troops enforce order. Ephesus cannot afford to be accused of riot.
So he papers over the cracks with soothing words, and the mob disperses. What is completely absent from the whole scene is any concern for truth. It is all about order, image, money and politics. Once that is stabilised again, "they all went home."

Acts 20:1–7
1 And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia.
2 And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece,
3 And there abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia.
4 And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus.
5 These going before tarried for us at Troas.
6 And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days.
7 And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.
Paul "purposed to return through Macedonia". He had opposition from the Jews and it seemed better to him to travel back the same way. So from Achaia (verse 2 – Greece) back to Macedonia, and from there back to Asia, where he had started out.
Quite a number of people travelled with Paul. These co-workers are seen as representatives of churches in other places – that is how they are listed. Co-workers of Paul as "contributions" from the various churches.

They served him and protected him. I think Paul himself travelled with the group named in verse 4. Another group evidently went by ship ahead of them to Troas, because that is how it is written.
Here we have the route in the reverse order of chapter 16. This time we are told what actually happened in Troas. They had come together on the first day of the week to break bread. That speaks of the unity of the Church, founded on the resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week. Bread and wine are a picture of Christ under the New Covenant and of the Life. Wine is a picture of the blood (life) of the New Covenant. Paul ended up giving a very long address on that first day of the week.

Acts 20:8–12
8 And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together.
9 And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead.
10 And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him.
11 When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed.
12 And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.
This incident at Troas is a picture of the Church throughout our whole dispensation. The Church has that abundant Light, the Word of God, and that distinguishes our position from that of the world. In addition, it says: “where they were gathered together”. Our position is not an earthly one, but a heavenly one. The “third loft” points to our position in heaven – the upper room – in the third heaven, the unseen realm which does not belong to the created order.
“A certain young man”, Eutychus (“the fortunate one” or “the one to whom good happens”), indeed has good happen to him. He “sat in the window”, an opening for going in and out at heavenly level. But he fell asleep. Our position as children of God, at least as far as life here on earth is concerned – so down below – is that of being dead: dead to the world, but alive to God and in the heavenly sphere.
Paul laid himself upon the dead Eutychus and tells them not to be “troubled”, because “his soul” – that is, his life – is in him. The dead young man is a picture of the ten tribes of Israel. Here they are identified with Paul, but really with the Lord; and through that identification they come to life. Not for the world, because as far as the world is concerned they are still “the lost tribes of Israel”: lost, gone, dead. But that is not actually so – you have to look higher up to find them.
The child, the servant, was brought back alive, and about that they were, understandably, “above measure comforted”.

Acts 20:13–17
13 And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot.
14 And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to

Mitylene.
15 And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus.
16 For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.
17 And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.
Chios is an island opposite Smyrna. They are sailing here along the coast, from island to island. Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, because he was evidently afraid that he would not get away again if he went there. He was in something of a hurry to be “at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost”. Paul sent someone who was with him back to Ephesus and “called the elders of the church” to come to him at Miletus.
Why is all this travel detail told to us? If you look at the route on a map, it is about “the islands of the sea”, or better: “the islands in the west”. In Hebrew, “sea” and “west” are the same word. From the standpoint of Israel, the sea lies in the west. “Islands” can be understood as coastal lands. The term carries the sense of far-off, isolated lands which are not easily reached.
The expression “islands in the west” in Greek, in Herodotus, is the designation for the British Isles, also called the “tin islands”. That the Gospel would go there is already mentioned in the Old Testament. In the New Testament we are then shown the “picture”. On a smaller scale we see the apostle travelling along these islands off the west coast of Asia. These islands stand as a model for the islands much further away to the west, the British Isles. That is why this is told to us here.

Acts 20:18–21
18 And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons,
19 Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:
20 And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house,
21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.
Serving the Lord is Paul’s occupation. In all humility, lowliness. He did that in public – in the school of Tyrannus – and he also went on house-visits. Everything there was to learn, all that was useful to know, he taught them. He kept nothing back. In verse 27 Paul says the same again. “Profitable” means “edifying” – that which builds up (among other places in 1 Corinthians 14). To “edify” is the usual word for building a house or a temple. The essence of Paul’s preaching of the Gospel was “repentance toward God, namely” – as the text goes on to say – “faith in our Lord Jesus Christ”. That is one and the same thing; they belong together.

This message of “repentance toward God” was for both Jews and Greeks, with the Jews mentioned first. They should listen to Him. That is repentance – and it goes further than merely believing that God exists. Demons do that as well, says James 2:19 – and the devil himself. To believe that God exists is self-evident. To trust what He has said, and so to give yourself over to Him, is quite another matter.

Acts 20:22–24
22 And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there:
23 Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.
24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.
I am inclined to write “spirit” here with a small letter: “being bound in spirit”. It is just as well that Paul does not know in detail what those “bonds and afflictions” will consist of.
The thought is that the apostle is here formally bringing his missionary journeys – his biblical career, we might say – to a close. His ministry continues until his death, and that still took some years. Of what he did in that interval we hear very little. That too is ministry, but then it is not so much about his preaching and its spread, as about the symbolism that lies behind the history.
His ministry is still “to testify the Gospel of the grace of God”. He carries on with that. The Gospel that Paul proclaims is the preaching of grace, because it is the preaching of the New Covenant, which has by now come into operation. “Gospel” includes the announcement that what was expected has now been realised. That is the meaning of the word. It is usually translated “good news”. That is not 100% accurate, because it is not always a joyful message. Mostly it is, and certainly when it concerns God’s Gospel – for that is the glad tidings.

Acts 20:25–28
25 And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.
26 Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.
27 For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.
28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.
Paul states explicitly here that those among whom he had previously been – they would see him no more; but others, elsewhere, would still see him. He is taking leave.
That does not refer only to the elders in Ephesus, because it says, “among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God”. The straightforward sense is that he does not intend to appear again in the places where he has been up to that point.

His journey is going to Jerusalem. From there he was taken as a prisoner to Rome, where he was released after two years. After that he travelled to Spain, as he had already indicated in Romans 15–16. In addition there are accounts in church history that the apostle visited Britain – England. Several church historians report that Paul travelled to the far west. Paul is the patron saint of London. According to various scattered statements by such writers he later returned to Rome after all, was imprisoned again, and executed. None of that stands in Scripture.
Once again, Scripture illustrates that the figurative meaning of “blood” is not “death”. Blood is life. So he is really saying: “I am pure from the life of you all.” This is followed by: “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” For what is necessary for the life of a child of God is that one knows and believes that counsel of God. He has given them everything necessary for that life. Paul has not fallen short in that.
In verse 28 Paul also speaks about blood, in the phrase “his own blood”. Over time people have tampered a bit with this verse, because it says “the church of God”. Combined with the idea that blood means death, the verse becomes puzzling. How could God, by His own death, acquire a Church? For God is not dead, has never died. From this it follows once more: blood does not mean death.
If you accept that blood means life, the verse presents no difficulty. Then you also do not need to invent a contrived construction like “by the blood of his own Son”, as is sometimes done. God has, under the New Covenant, acquired that Church by His own blood, by His own life – life in the active sense of the word. Blood is an “organ” that moves throughout the whole body. It travels a path; it is active. So it is with life. The risen Lord Jesus Christ lives for the believers, in the service of God, as Head of the Church. His blood is in us, in you and me. On that basis Scripture says that we are members of His Body. What does blood do? It cleanses, it removes everything that does not belong in the body. Alongside that, with the same blood, “building materials” are supplied. It is a matter of inflow and outflow, building up and cleansing. That is what the Lord does to us. He also uses other members of His Body in that process. But it is, in fact, God’s own work.
The Holy Spirit appoints overseers to shepherd the Church of God. Whether “his” then refers to “the Holy Ghost” or to “God” makes no practical difference. You could just as well read “Christ” there.

Acts 20:29–30
29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.
30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.
“They shall enter in among you!” The “grievous wolves” arise “from among your own selves”. From the leadership, for these words are addressed to the elders. From among them “men shall arise, speaking perverse things” – twisted things. Their aim is to draw disciples away after themselves and so form a flock of their own.

In general, the whole of Protestantism looks like this: here someone, there someone, each as a leader with his “own” flock. That is exactly what the apostle is describing here – but not in a positive sense.
John describes them as “little children” among whom “antichrists” have arisen – those who in practice deny that Christ is our Head. They were not that, but they became that, and many of them, in fact (1 John 2:18). That phenomenon was already present then and still is.
Those who have placed themselves in the place of the Head, Christ, cause unrest in the Church. Paul speaks quite sharply about them in Galatians 5:12: “I would they were even cut off which trouble you.” That unrest is caused especially by putting people under law – by imposing requirements on them, a law or the Law. Why do people do that? Because they wish to exercise power over people who are free.
If someone chooses to place his life in the hands of another person, or of an organisation, then that is his choice. But Scripture teaches that we should commit our lives to the Lord Jesus Christ. We should trust in Him. We need nothing more than to go through life as His possession, as His children. Then He will care for us.

Acts 20:31–35
31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.
32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.
33 I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.
34 Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.
35 I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.
Paul points back to what he has done and said for three years. The wording is something like: “I commend you to the word of his grace.” It is always grace that it is about, and not a recommendation to put people under the law.
Paul is therefore going up to Jerusalem in order to demonstrate something. Evidently it was not the intention that Paul should go to Jerusalem in the expectation, or hope, of finally bringing the Jewish people to another mindset. Salvation, the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, is being rejected in Jerusalem.
Yet no one will be able to say: the Jewish people had no chance, or: they did not understand what it was about, or: “It all went by so quickly, it was just that one Day of Pentecost and then it was over.” They have had ample opportunity – first in the days of the Lord Jesus Himself, but certainly in the days after the resurrection of Christ, starting in Acts 2.
We have come across the Jewish Sanhedrin several times, and the outcome of its deliberations was always: “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14). “We do not want to hear of that Name, we do

not want you to speak in His Name.” In the remaining chapters of Acts we find exactly the same thing.

Acts 21:1–4
1 And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara:
2 And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth.
3 Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden.
4 And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem.
Earlier in Acts we already saw how the apostle travelled via these islands, and how all those islands and coastal places were mentioned. It really should strike us that the route is suddenly set out in such detail here – so that you know that Paul was going “to the west”, to “the islands of the sea”. That is a picture of the west coast of Europe and the islands of the sea, to which the Gospel in reality went after it had been rejected by the Jews.
From Cos to Rhodes, and then to the harbour town of Patara, on the south coast of present-day Turkey. “Patara” can be translated as “suffering”, “scattered”, “cursed”, “letting go”. That is essentially four times the same thought. It speaks of our dispensation, in which salvation went to the islands of the sea. You gradually come to the mainland again, and those concepts fit very well with a judgement over Israel.
So we arrive at Cyprus. They “left it on the left hand”. Cyprus serves as a model for Britain as such. There, in the typological sense, is the position of the Church. Paul’s journeys begin and end with Cyprus. The ship only puts in there once – that is where the story starts – and then you hear nothing more about it. It disappears into the background.
Here the island is mentioned again – they are in its vicinity, but they leave it to port, as we say, they pass it on the left. So it is with the land of Joseph. For a moment something is shown, and then it fades again, because the rights of the firstborn are, as such, fixed in the promises to Joseph (Ephraim). That is a story in the background. For our personal salvation that does not make a difference, but from God’s side it is the legal basis for the position of the Church.
The destination is Syria, the port of Tyre, in what is now Lebanon – formerly a region of Syria. The building materials for the temple, supplied by King Hiram, came from there. In our day it is about the building of the Temple, and that is associated with “Lebanon”. Lebanon is one of the names for Britain. In our language we call it “Albion”. It is the same as “Laban” and always has the meaning “white”.
Wherever you read “Lebanon” in Scripture you find that second layer of meaning. It points to Albion, and so to that island in the west where “the temple would be built” – where the foundation lies for the temple and therefore for the building of the Church.

Tyre was actually an island, just off the coast. It resembled “St Michael’s Mount” off the coast of Cornwall, and “Mont Saint-Michel” off the coast of Normandy. Both are mentioned in connection with the spread of the Gospel – St Michael’s Mount certainly. That little island off the coast of Normandy or that little island off the coast of Cornwall is a picture of the much larger Britain, the great island off the coast of Europe.
I have always been struck by the fact that places where it is said that the Lord Himself has been, or where the apostles are said to have laboured, almost always have something to do with water – either on the coast or at some legendary spring. That is illustrative of what was really going to happen. According to the prophets, especially Isaiah, the message goes to the coasts, to the islands of the sea, where living water would be. Those things belong together.
The whole cargo of that ship on which Paul is travelling is destined for Tyre. That is where the ship must be unloaded. The whole message has to be delivered there. There were disciples there. They stayed seven days and met some believers. The number seven is not used here merely as a time indicator, but as a pointer to God’s work in that period. Seven speaks of the work that God does: 7000 years, 7 dispensations, 7 days of creation. Exactly after “the seven” the Lord will go to Jerusalem. When the work in our dispensation is finished, then Jerusalem comes into view.
With the words “who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem” in verse 4, we come to the biggest problem in the story of Acts. Should Paul have gone to Jerusalem or not? Some say that his imprisonment was a judgement from God – that he should never have gone there, because the Lord (the Spirit) had said here in Tyre, through those believers, that he should not go up to Jerusalem.
But why, then, does the Lord tell Paul that he will be imprisoned in Jerusalem? That is clear from verse 13 of this chapter. If it had been against the Lord’s will, the Lord would hardly have told him what would happen to him there.
The whole point is that “not going up to Jerusalem” has a symbolic meaning. The seven days are a picture of the Church. Our present dispensation is indicated by 7 angels, 7 churches and 7 golden lampstands in Revelation 2 and 3 – so there you already have three sevens connected with our dispensation, in which salvation does not, as such, have its dwelling place in Jerusalem.
If it says here “seven days” and Paul is in Tyre, on that little island off the coast, on that rock – and it is said that they should not go up to Jerusalem – then you really ought to recognise at once the picture of the situation in our own time.

Acts 21:5–6
5 And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed.
6 And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again.

There is a further reference to those seven days (“these days”). In spite of the fact that they had been told not to go up to Jerusalem, they are nevertheless accompanied and seen off for part of the way. On the shore, outside the city, “all” of them – including women and children – are together. They kneel down.
Once again it is indicated that this is a definitive farewell to the believers who are on “those islands”. From here the story continues in Jerusalem. So it will be in the future, after the rapture of the Church. Only then will the Gospel truly go to Jerusalem again. Until that time it is not centred in Jerusalem; and if it is in Jerusalem, then it is bound there and persecuted. That remains the case right up to our own day.

Acts 21:7–9
7 And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day.
8 And the next day we that were of Paul’s company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him.
9 And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.
The original harbour town was then called Ptolemais; now it is called “Akko”. It lies in the territory allotted to the tribe of Asher, from the time before the ten tribes disappeared. In the New Testament we come across someone from the tribe of Asher (Luke 2:36): Hannah, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. “She was of a great age”, and had lived with her husband seven years from her virginity. She was a widow of about eighty-four years. That is 7 and 7 and 70 – twelve times seven.
Someone from Asher – and you wonder what that has to do with things, and why it is mentioned. There is a Jewish tradition about this which I cannot really explain here. I think that the appearance of that woman from Asher in Luke 2 should have been a sign to the Jews – a recognition of something that ought to have been familiar. The ship’s putting in at Ptolemais probably plays a part here as well. It is at any rate a striking detail. Through the connection with Joseph, the mention of Asher has, in my view, to do with the ten-tribes question.
It is striking that you find here references back to earlier histories in this same Bible book. Caesarea has already appeared in earlier chapters of Acts, and Philip we meet even further back, in Acts 6. He was one of the seven deacons. In chapter 8 he is doing the work of an evangelist in Samaria – from Jerusalem to Samaria.
In Caesarea it began: there the door to the Gentiles was opened by Peter. From there the missionary journeys set out. “Caesarea” means, loosely translated, “city of the emperor”. It began there, and it ends in Rome, the city of the emperor. That completes the story-frame: it began in Jerusalem; via Caesarea the Gospel went to the nations; and here the Gentile Paul comes, via Caesarea, via the house of Philip, back to Jerusalem. The direction is reversed. It began with the Jew preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles; it ends with the Gentile preaching the Gospel to the Jew – but the Jew does not want it, and so Paul is taken prisoner. He

then makes the journey once more, as a prisoner: he is taken from Jerusalem to Caesarea and from there finally to Rome.
There were four daughters who prophesied. That, however, is not entirely consistent symbolically: you would expect five, because “five” stands for what is hidden, spiritual, invisible. “Four” belongs to the material, the perishable, the temporary. Four is, among other things, the number of time and matter. If there is to be real prophecy in that typical sense, then it ought to be “five”.
They were virgins. A virgin – an unmarried young woman – is, in any case, childless. If you ask me, these four virgins (daughters) are a picture of Israel under the Law. That corresponds to that period. The Law is the fourth dispensation, and Israel, as a woman, is under the Law. But if you say of Israel, “she was still a virgin”, then that is not good, because Israel was married to the Lord. Scripture tells us that there was indeed a marriage between the Lord and Israel, but there was no marital union – therefore the marriage was unfruitful. That is not very becoming in the case of a married woman.
So the four prophesying daughters perhaps prophesy by being a picture of Israel under the Old Covenant. We are not told what they literally prophesied. I rather suspect they did not have much worthwhile to say. What does happen is this:

Acts 21:10–11
10 And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus.
11 And when he was come unto us, he took Paul’s girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.
We already know Agabus from Acts 11. Even then he did not have much good to announce. The man belongs, as it were, in Jerusalem, but in chapter 11 you find him in Antioch, and in chapter 21 in Caesarea. He stands at the beginning and at the end of Paul’s journeys.
His prophecy about the spiritual famine in our entire dispensation – it is only one verse there – returns here. That “famine period” begins; God hides Himself. Agabus does not say that Paul must not go to Jerusalem. He is simply stating what will happen.
What he pictures is that Paul would become, and be, a prisoner of Jesus Christ in our present time – an exile. And in that he is an example for the whole Church. We see that in a positive light: we are prisoners of Christ Jesus. We do not belong “in Jerusalem”. We belong “in exile”, where the Lord is doing His work in secret. The future events connected with Paul in this section are, among other things, a picture of that.
The “binding, and delivering into the hands of the Gentiles” of Paul, which begins in this chapter, continues right through to the end of this Bible book. He is placed “outside the camp”, as it were – in exile, not part of the world. That is why his imprisonment plays such an important role, also in the epistles.

Agabus, as a fifth prophet, after the four who prophesied in verse 9, shows us the characteristics of the fifth dispensation. With “four” you are still under the Law and with Israel; with “five”, with Agabus (whose name means “the beloved”), you are with the Church.

Acts 21:12–16
12 And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.
13 Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.
14 And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.
15 And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem.
16 There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.
They tried to prevent Paul from going up to Jerusalem. But the apostle knows what he has to do. He does not allow himself to be “dissuaded” – and that is, of course, as it should be.
“With them”, in verse 16, is not quite the sense; it is more like: “bringing us to a certain Mnason”. They stayed with a certain Mnason, of Cyprus. Where he lived remains hidden, and so belongs to the things that are concealed.
The story of Paul’s missionary journeys begins with a certain Joseph, surnamed Barnabas. He was from Cyprus. Here we are at the end of the story, years later, and we find an old disciple – from Cyprus. His name also points to this: “Mnason” is etymologically related to our word “memory”. For remembrance.
If you ask me, Mnason is a picture of the ten tribes of Israel, because the Lord would “remember them” – and they, in turn, would remember the Lord, at last: their origin, where they came from. That leads far back into history, and that is why he is also called “an old disciple”. It points to the very old promise from God, specifically to Joseph and Ephraim, concerning the birthright.

Acts 21:17–21
17 And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.
18 And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.
19 And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.
20 And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:
21 And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.

James is still regarded as the leader of the church in Jerusalem, just as in Acts 15. In Galatians 1 Paul says that he was “unknown by face” to the believers in Jerusalem. They did not know him; they had never really met him – at least, not consciously. He had only visited Peter and James, and Barnabas had brought him there. Here he visits James again. “All the elders were present.” The discussion is about the same issue as in Acts 15 – a problem that arose at the beginning of the story.

At that time Paul was still on the way under the name “Saul”, and that name points to the Law. Peter said then that it was not the intention to put a yoke on the neck of the Gentiles which their fathers had not been able to bear. He also says that Jews believe that they will be saved in the same way as the Gentiles (Acts 15:10–11) – that is, without the Law. Apparently this had not really penetrated in Jerusalem itself.

Letters were written and circulated saying that the Gentiles did not have to live under the Law. But the believers from among the Jews continued to do so. That is clear here. The same conflict reappears after Paul has reported how things had gone.

You may assume that in Jerusalem itself there were thousands of believing Jews – that was already the case in Acts 2, when three thousand came to faith, and then more were added every day. That is quite a number. The conclusion here is that they continued to live under the Law, while that was absolutely not the intention. They are called “zealous for the Law”, in the same breath as the renewed accusation that Paul was teaching the Jews “among the Gentiles” to apostatise from Moses and not to live according to the Law. In a certain sense Paul does teach that.

Only, “to forsake Moses” is not quite accurate, because the main issue is that people clung to their own laws – which they had devised precisely so as not to have to keep the Law of Moses. (See John 7.) By God’s standards there is quite a difference between Jewish law and Mosaic Law.

Paul is teaching them not to continue living as Jews. It is not so much about getting rid of the Mosaic Law; at the end of the chapter he even says that he does keep the Law. That sounds a bit strange to us, but strictly speaking it is true: he does keep the Law. We do too – and precisely because we keep the Law, we do not live under it. According to the Law we are dead, and that means that those who have died do not live under the Law any longer (see Romans 5–7). We are not under the Law; indeed, it is anti-Christ to want to live under the Law.

Someone once said: but some parts of the Law are surely useful? James answers that in James 2:10: “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” If you think you must live under some parts of the Law, then you must keep the whole Law – all of it. You cannot say: “I like that part and not the rest.” That is blasphemous. So it is either the whole Law, or nothing. And of course it is “nothing”, for we are dead.

The “Law problem” had therefore still not been solved in Jerusalem, even after years. That is not really surprising, because Judaism is religion, and religion is by definition focused on the outward, the external – on the old man. Religions service is to serve ‘god’ with a small ‘g’, as a collection of laws and rules to which a person subjects himself. “Religious behaviour”,

although it need not have anything to do with the service of God or with faith, means that one acts scrupulously.

Acts 21:22–25
22 What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come.
23 Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them;
24 Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.
25 As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.
The believers in Jerusalem want to do something about “the conflict”. They introduce a Jewish custom: when a vow is made, one shaves. Then the beard comes off. With “take them, and purify thyself with them” they are telling Paul – who, only a few weeks earlier in Acts 18 had also shaved his head after making a vow – to shave again. The costs would be covered.
The purpose was that “all may know” – all the believers from among the Jews, in Jerusalem – that there was nothing in the rumours that Paul did not keep the Law. They do not even ask whether those rumours are true. They simply assume that Paul lives as they do. That seems rather naive to me. They should have known better. The most basic biblical truth about not being justified by the Law had apparently not, or not sufficiently, sunk in.
Once again it becomes clear that the Jews, even when they come to faith, cling to their Judaism. They hold fast to the Law and want that to be confirmed by Paul. “Show that, then, so everyone can see that you yourself also keep the Law.”
By practising one specific Jewish regulation – which I cannot find in the Mosaic Law – it is to be “demonstrated” that Paul keeps the Law in general. That assumption underlies what is being asked of him here.
Verse 25 is a side-note. The believers in Jerusalem are still content – as reported in Acts 15 – that the believers from among the Gentiles do not keep the Law. They had written this to them previously. For them it remains: they should “abstain from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication”. That is exactly what we read in Acts 15:20, 29.
But for the Jews it has to be different – at least, that is what they want to see confirmed. In effect they are saying: let us now demonstrate this clearly to the outside world – not only to the Jewish-Christian public, but also to the wider Jewish public in the temple. In other words: “We are still Jews; we just have an unusual conviction, from the point of view of the non-believing Jews – namely, that the Messiah has already come.”

Acts 21:26
26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them. +1
Paul “took the men with him”. He did what was asked. He went along with it. With those four men he himself becomes the “fifth” in the group. “Four” stands for the Old Covenant of the Law – the fourth dispensation. After that comes the “five” of the grace of God. You see that pattern again here.
Verse 26 has never become entirely clear – not to the translators (as is evident from the various additions), and not to me either. In any case it is about being clean. It involves a ritual cleansing of Paul and those four. They remained seven days in the temple – that was evidently linked to the vow, though we do not know the details. Sacrifices still had to be offered for them – those typical legal requirements.

Acts 21:27–29
27 And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him,
28 Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.
29 (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)
This shows how unfamiliar Paul and “Jerusalem” were with each other. The Jews in Jerusalem did not know him, but the “Jews of Asia”, where Paul had preached, knew him and recognised him. The foreign Jews were in the temple for the occasion and raised the alarm. These foreign Jews call the local Jews (“Men of Israel”) to help.
They point to Paul as “the man” who is teaching against Judaism, against the Jewish Law, and against this “holy place” – that is, the temple. That cannot really be denied.
Take note especially of the expression “that teacheth all men every where”. We know that wording from Acts 17:30: “God… now commandeth all men every where to repent.” Here they are shouting, in effect: “Paul teaches all men, everywhere, against Judaism, the Jewish religion, the Jewish Law, and this Jewish place – the temple.”
Indeed, Paul preached that in our days the Lord is building a Temple – a spiritual Temple, a dwelling-place of God in the Spirit. That is instead of the temple in Jerusalem. In John 4 the Lord Jesus answers the Samaritan woman, when she asks whether God should be worshipped in Jerusalem or on Mount Gerizim, that the hour is coming when that will no longer matter at all, because people will worship everywhere – but then only in spirit and in truth. Not in some specific place, but in every place. That is also what Paul taught – even in the temple precincts, within Judaism itself.
For the worship of the true God, one does not need to go to Jerusalem, or to any other particular place. Only, the Jews in Jerusalem simply could not imagine that.

Paul is also accused of having defiled the temple by bringing “Greeks” into it. They “supposed” – because they had seen him earlier in the city with Trophimus, the Ephesian – that Paul had brought him into the temple (into the forecourt). Something like that was not permitted in Judaism: there was a court for Jews and a separate court for Gentiles. There simply had to remain a distinction between Jews and Gentiles.
The word “supposed” shows that this had not actually happened, and that Paul and Trophimus had at any rate not been caught doing it. I do not think Paul would have done such a thing. Scripture does not pursue the accusation. It was enough to cause a riot – despite Paul’s goodwill in adapting himself to the Jewish Christians and thus to Judaism. In spite of his willingness to go along with them, the Jews still wanted nothing to do with him. That is the point. Whatever you do to adapt yourself to that system, it will always remain hostile.

Acts 21:30–36
30 And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut.
31 And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.
32 Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul.
33 Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done.
34 And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle.
35 And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people.
36 For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him.
Paul was being beaten – not just a little, because they were trying to kill him. But when they “saw the chief captain and the soldiers”, they stopped. Understandably – otherwise they themselves would have been arrested by the Romans, for it was they who were in power.
Paul is rescued from his desperate situation, but he is also bound with “two chains”. When the “chief captain of the band” asks who he is and what he has done, it turns into a complete chaos; everyone is shouting at once. Paul is led away from the temple area and actually carried by the soldiers, because of “the violence of the crowd”. The multitude was shouting: “Away with him!”
Where have we heard that before? They did not want the Lord Jesus, they did not want Stephen – that will be referred to shortly – and they do not want Paul either. Through Paul we are brought back again to the Lord Jesus Himself. Here in Acts, even after 21 chapters, nothing has changed.

Acts 21:37–40

37 And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek?
38 Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?
39 But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people.
40 And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying,
Up to this point Paul had not said anything. He wants to speak – in Greek – but the Romans think he is an Egyptian, the one who had “raised an uproar and led the 4,000 murderers into the wilderness” some time before.
Perhaps the confusion arose because Paul had shaved off his beard, so that he was taken for an Egyptian. Jews wear beards; Egyptians do not — there must be a difference! Paul identifies himself and asks permission to address the people.
The chief captain over a thousand men does not really know what is going on – that becomes clear several times in what follows. He certainly does not understand what Paul is saying, and evidently does not speak Hebrew or Aramaic. He speaks Greek, and probably Latin. He has no idea what the issue is, but he does allow Paul to speak to the crowd “in the Hebrew tongue” – as a Jewish man addressing Jewish people.
Because of the scourging that follows Paul’s speech – in order to find out from him what was actually going on – it is clear that the chief captain had not understood. But he does allow Paul to speak in the language of religion, the language of the Bible. That is the sacred language, not the everyday language people spoke among themselves. It is the language of the synagogue and nothing more.
Hebrew only became a spoken, everyday language in the days of the present State of Israel. Formerly it was the language of Scripture, which was never used in public in general life. There is no other Hebrew than biblical Hebrew, and that was used only in reading the Bible and in speaking about it in the synagogue. The Talmud is written in Hebrew, because the language is considered holy. In any case, that brings calm, and Paul is able to tell his story from the steps in front of the crowd.

Acts 22:1–5
1 Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you.
2 (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,)
3 I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.
4 And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into

prisons both men and women.
5 As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished.
Gamaliel still has a reputation among the Jews, even to this day. He is known as one of the great Jewish scholars of Scripture. The phrase “according to the most exact manner” means: in a detailed, meticulous, precise way – words that also fit with “religious”.
Paul once thought that he was “zealous toward God”. But that turned out not really to be the case. He immediately qualifies it with: “as ye all are this day.” They, just as Paul (as Saul) had done, mixed religion with worldly authority. He is talking about the persecution and punishment of believers in those days.
That is what Paul had been doing. In Acts 9 it is described: he goes on his way with letters from the high priest, heading for Damascus to arrest the “apostate” Jews there and bring them as prisoners to the Jewish council in Jerusalem. That is what he is referring to here.

Acts 22:6–8
6 And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.
7 And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?
8 And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.
Paul recounts his experience and gives his former name. Under the name Saul he persecuted the Christians, the Church — but the Lord says, “Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” Which shows that, even in Acts 9, the Church is already regarded as the Body of Christ. This is often denied with the claim that the believers in Acts were still a “Jewish congregation” and therefore unrelated to the Church. But the Lord himself identifies them with His own Person.
Paul’s reply — “Who art Thou, Lord?” — we recognise from the Old Testament. When the LORD (Jehovah) speaks to someone, the usual question is: whom am I speaking with? That is where we get the Name: “I AM THAT I AM.” Abraham asked, Moses asked, Gideon, Noah, and Samuel. Here the Lord’s answer is: “I am Jesus of Nazareth, the Nazarene.” In Acts 2:22 Peter calls Him by exactly this title: “Jesus the Nazarene.”
The Lord is Jesus, and Jesus is the Lord. What matters is that you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and that He is Jehovah. We will see this again in the days of the return of Christ: Israel will then call upon the “Name of the LORD”, in order to know Who stands before them. He will appear to them, and still they will ask who He is. Then it will be revealed: Jesus of Nazareth.

Acts 22:9–16

9 And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.
10 And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.
11 And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.
12 And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there,
13 Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him.
14 And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth.
15 For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.
16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.
The phrase “they heard not” raises the discussion seen in Acts 9, where it says those with Paul did hear. They heard a sound, but did not understand what was being spoken. One text uses “hearing” in the sense of physical perception; the other uses “hearing” in the sense of comprehension.
It is as if we are still in Acts 2, at the end of Peter’s sermon — even though we are far ahead chronologically. The principle is unchanged: “be baptised and wash away your sins.” Both expressions are metaphorical. When someone comes to faith, they are baptised — that is a biblical fact. “Calling on the Name of the Lord” is the Old Testament phrase that accompanies this. Peter also uses it, quoting Joel 2.

Acts 22:17–22
17 And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance;
18 And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.
19 And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee:
20 And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.
21 And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.
22 And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.
What verse 17 states about him “praying in the temple” is not mentioned in Acts 9, though it fits the history. This was after he escaped Damascus through a window in a basket. Then he went to Jerusalem — that is the event referenced here. He says that he “was in a trance”, the state in

which prophets may find themselves when they see or hear what is not ordinarily seen or heard, yet perceive it.
He is told to leave Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept his testimony about the Lord. Paul simply recounts his conversion story: this is what happened; I did not choose it — it came upon me. He had also once been a zealot for the Jewish Law, but the Lord intervened — independently of Paul's will. That was God's purpose: that He would send Paul to the Gentiles. And that is precisely what happened. He came to Asia Minor, and those very Jews from Asia now recognise him again here in Jerusalem. They reject Paul.
The statement "away with such a one" has a much larger meaning: "away with Christ" — and therefore away with His present work and the gathering of the Church. They rejected the **first Redeemer**. Then the Jewish nation will have to wait for the coming of Boaz, the **second Redeemer** — that will be at the return of Christ. They reject "Ploni Almoni" and his inheritance; perhaps they would accept Boaz — but the time has not yet come. They must wait.
Just as they rejected the Lord Jesus, so they now reject the apostle Paul. They could just as well have cried: "Away with him! Crucify him!" They want nothing to do with it. They even say he ought not to live, because he "hands over" Judaism and Jewish matters to the Gentiles.
The Jewish listeners can no longer contain themselves, especially at: "I will send thee **far away** to the Gentiles." That is the moment they erupt. Throughout Acts we have seen this: the Jews are filled with jealousy, resentment. They are interested as long as they think Paul's message is exclusively for Jews. When it turns out it is meant for Gentiles as well, they do not want it. If the Gospel is for Gentiles, the Jews grow angry.
For this reason some say: do not preach the Gospel to Jews — it only irritates them. But Scripture teaches that we should, in the hope that their jealousy may eventually drive them to receive the Gospel.

Acts 22:23–24
23 And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air,
24 The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him.
After the usual displays of rage, the pattern repeats: Paul is pulled away from the Jews. The chief captain still does not know what the dispute is about. It is not a Gentile issue; it is an internal Jewish matter — and the text emphasises that.
Here the Jewish people receive **another** opportunity to hear the Gospel and accept "Such a One" — the Lord Jesus Christ. The Roman commander takes Paul under his protection. Not because he favours him, but because he intervenes against the crowd. Later we learn his name: "Lysias" — which is introduced in Acts 23:26 ("Claudius Lysias"), then in 24:7 and 24:22. "Lysias" means "the looser" — the releaser — akin to "the deliverer". Not in the sense of a ransom, but in the sense of someone who frees. If you ask me, he is a type of Christ. He takes pity on Paul.

The name is only given in chapter 23, because it does not sit well with chapters 21–22 where he initially orders Paul to be scourged. But once he is called “Lysias”, you are pointed toward Christ.

Acts 22:25–30
25 And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?
26 When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman.
27 Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea.
28 And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born.
29 Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.
30 On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.
We have already seen in Acts that a Roman could not be scourged without trial — that was in Philippi. Paul appeals to his Roman citizenship, and this is evidently accepted at once. Perhaps because such citizenship could be purchased — the chief captain admits as much — but Paul states that he is a Roman **by birth**. That is taken very seriously, because Romans had legal privileges.
They should not have bound Paul; therefore they immediately free him. It was the same in Philippi: when Paul declared his Roman citizenship, he was treated with honour, even escorted away — perhaps to prevent legal claims for damages.
Yet the chief captain still does not know what is happening. It is still a Jewish matter. Therefore the Sanhedrin is summoned. Paul must now appear formally before the Council. This is no longer a street riot, but the established Jewish authority.
Paul is presented before Jewish authorities three times:

1. The Jewish-Christian assembly in Jerusalem, who assumed Paul obeyed Jewish customs.
2. The crowd at the Temple, ordinary Jews.
3. The Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish court.

Thus the Gospel is presented at every level. One cannot say that the Jewish people were not given opportunity. Paul is brought before the Sanhedrin — at the initiative of a Roman officer. Here is Paul the Roman citizen, under Roman protection, standing before the Jewish Council. Once again, from Gentile side, the Word of Christ is declared to the Jews. They fully understood this, at every level.
They are given opportunity repeatedly to receive the Gospel and to accept the Lord Jesus. Religious and political Jews alike. Though they are given the chance — and sometimes come close — they refuse it. For many

reasons, but chiefly for political ones: they wish to retain power. To believe in the Lord Jesus means relinquishing that power.
These chapters illustrate that when the Gospel is preached — even at high levels — people may show interest, but in the end they do not want it. They prefer their privileged positions and their involvement in politics.
It is a strong illustration that politics and Christianity are in constant tension. They are incompatible. In politics, every politician must distort or withhold truth to some degree — otherwise they cannot progress. For a believer, there is one concern: the truth — all the truth — and nothing but the truth. These two realms do not coexist.
Therefore I am highly allergic to the idea that those of us charged with preaching God's Word should do so politically, cunningly, or strategically. I wholly disbelieve in that. Those are worldly methods, fundamentally at odds with the message itself. If your method contradicts the content of the Gospel, you will not become more credible by using it.

Acts 23
In Acts 23 Paul addresses the Sanhedrin. Whether this was in Hebrew is not stated this time — likely it was.

Acts 23:1–6
1 And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.
2 And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.
3 Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?
4 And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?
5 Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.
6 But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.
A good conscience before God is admirable — but people will not thank you for it. You are expected to have a good conscience before people — that is the social standard.
When Paul was apprehended on his way to Damascus, he was later entrusted to a man named Ananias. The high priest at the time of Jesus' condemnation was Caiaphas, who alternated office with his father-in-law, Annas. That name — "Ananias", "Chananya" — means "Jehovah is gracious". It is the same root as "John". It is a term connected with the New Covenant. So there is something ironic about this man being named Ananias: his name indicates that the New Covenant has begun — and therefore he should no longer be high priest.
Striking someone on the mouth is an old Jewish practice. In 1 Kings 22:24 the prophet Micaiah is struck, because he said things the king did not want to hear. He receives a blow on the jaw — the mouth that speaks.

Hence Samson and the jawbone, from which water flowed. To strike the mouth is to silence it — to shut it.
They did not want to hear Paul, yet he speaks, and his words come from the Old Testament (Ezekiel 13:10–16). The “whitened wall” has a bad reputation: it is a wall coated with lime to hide that there is not enough mortar between the stones. It looks tidy on the outside but is structurally weak. It corresponds to “whitewashed tombs” (Matthew 23:27) — outwardly attractive, inwardly worthless. It belongs to the desire to “make a fair appearance” (Galatians 6:12).
How Paul did not know it was the high priest, I cannot say. If you ask me, Paul said much more than is recorded — as often in Scripture, the retellings grow shorter when repeated. Paul’s speech always returns to the same point: the resurrection from the dead. That is the essence of the Gospel.
In Acts 1–4 it is repeatedly proclaimed: God raised Christ, and we are witnesses. The meaning of “witness” in Scripture is to be a witness of the resurrection of Christ — “You shall be My witnesses” — namely that He lives. Eternal life brought into reality by the resurrection of Christ, and with it the arrival of the New Covenant and even a New Creation.
So Paul says nothing wrong when he states he is “judged for the hope — that is, the resurrection of the dead.” That is precisely what is at issue. The living Christ is disputed — and Paul must proclaim Him with force, in what was surely a very hostile environment.

Acts 23:7–10
7 And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.
8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.
9 And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees’ part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.
10 And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.
Paul likely knew that discord would break out between Pharisees and Sadducees. He certainly knew that one group denied the resurrection altogether, and the other affirmed it. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection; the Sadducees are comparable to modern liberals: they do not believe in anything that cannot be seen.
We do not understand how resurrection works — but we know that it works, and that is what matters. It has already been demonstrated in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, witnessed by more than 500 people (1 Corinthians 15:6). No court can evade that.
The two groups are thoroughly opposed and immediately fall upon one another. The narrative is almost humorous: the Pharisees suddenly take Paul’s side — he was a Pharisee, and believed in the resurrection. Their conclusion: whether an angel or spirit has spoken to him — even if the

Sadducees deny such things — “let us not fight against God.” That is sound reasoning.
It closely resembles Gamaliel’s advice in Acts 5: if it is God’s work, do not resist; if it is of men, it will collapse on its own. Again they fail to condemn Paul. First it was the crowd in chapter 21; now it is the Sanhedrin. Again the chief captain (Lysias) must rescue Paul from the hands of the Jews. None of this reflects well upon the Sanhedrin.

Acts 23:11–13
11 And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.
12 And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.
13 And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.
Tensions are high, yet Paul knows he must go to Rome — it makes things simpler. Much would yet happen before he arrived in Rome, but that would be his destination. What else the Lord told him here we do not know; perhaps Paul knew that he should appeal to Caesar (Acts 25). In any case, that became the means by which he would reach Rome.
The phrase “certain of the Jews” does not actually appear in the Greek; that translation softens the statement. The text intends: **the Jews** — not that every Jew participated, but that this action came from the Jewish side.
To “bind themselves under a curse” means an oath was sworn: they invoked the judgment of the Most High if they broke their vow. They called down a curse upon themselves — if they should eat or drink before killing Paul. One wonders what became of them.
More than forty took this oath together. They are a picture of the Jewish people in our present time — represented by Israel’s forty years in the wilderness. Delivered from Egypt, not yet in Canaan. Fundamentally redeemed, yet still unbelieving. Such a curse rests upon Israel so long as they reject the Lord. They will lack food and drink — life.

Acts 23:14–19
14 And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul.
15 Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.
16 And when Paul’s sister’s son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.
17 Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him.
18 So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man

unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee.
19 Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me?
They plot to kill Paul and set about carrying it out. That is difficult while he remains in the fortress. They attempt it through “the chief priests and elders”: the Sanhedrin was receptive to those who would “arrange matters” covertly. Judas — a picture of the Jewish nation — struck his deal with the Sanhedrin for money.
They increase pressure by their self-imposed curse and propose a plan: “If you arrange a meeting of the council tomorrow, and ask Lysias to bring Paul again so you may examine him, then while he is being escorted to you, we will kill him.” On that short stretch of path they would attack him.
At that point a figure appears whom we have not met before: the son of Paul’s sister — his nephew, of a younger generation. He is called a “young man.” We do not know the sister’s name or his name. That omission is suspicious; we can roughly guess what it represents: the other branch of the family — the ten-tribe question. Here we find the Jews—the two tribes —lying in wait to kill him; therefore we expect that something will be arranged from the ten tribes of Israel. Literally or figuratively. Here, figuratively: that sister and her son are a picture of the ten tribes.
It must have been a small boy, because it says, “the chief captain took him by the hand.”

Acts 23 : 20–22
20 And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly.
21 But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.
22 So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me.
The young man talks about “the Jews” and does not count himself among them. Whether he is Jewish by birth or not, you cannot say for certain. That in itself is rather suspicious. It seems as though his part in this has nothing to do with Judaism as such. But we do not know the family relationships exactly. Perhaps Paul’s sister had a different father, so that this nephew really was not Jewish, but Roman.
You wonder: how did these things reach this boy’s ears? In what kind of special situation was he, that he picked all this up and knew what was going to happen? He must have enjoyed certain privileges – on the Jewish side, or on the Roman side, or perhaps on both. In any case, people must not have known him as a relative of Paul. It all remains rather vague.
But the underlying thought remains that we are dealing here with another branch of the family, from which deliverance comes. Even if we do not know literally how it is put together, figuratively speaking we do. For the sake of those ten tribes of Israel Paul is rescued. That is the point.

After this we hear nothing more at all about the boy, and nothing more about Paul's sister either. That is simply how it always goes in such situations. That "other branch of the family" steps briefly onto the stage, saves the whole situation, and then disappears again. That is characteristic of the work of God in our present time. Things went wrong with the Jews, with the Jewish people, but there is another branch of the Israelite family, and along that line the Lord accomplishes His work and "will finish the work, and cut it short upon the earth." (Romans 9:28)

Acts 23 : 23–30
23 And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night;
24 And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.
25 And he wrote a letter after this manner:
26 Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting.
27 This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman.
28 And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council:
29 Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds.
30 And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.
Two hundred soldiers is quite something. I do not know what this commander really thinks about the Jews, but he is certainly wary of them. It seems to me that the "spearmen" are also simply soldiers. They were to leave in the middle of the night. Presumably Claudius Lysias is also glad to be rid of the whole business.
The purpose is that Paul is brought from Jerusalem to Caesarea. That is rather amusing, because in doing so he walks the road of the Gospel once more. It began in Jerusalem and then went to Caesarea, from where the Gospel would be carried across the sea. For this occasion Rome is the representation of that, because the real "ends of the earth" are not really in view anywhere in Acts. Rome can function in that role for the time being. It is symbolic.
So he makes the journey again, only this time somewhat slowly. Before he ever leaves Caesarea, a few years have passed. We know where the story is heading, and that is where this Bible book ends. That outcome is, as it were, already announced here. Paul remains a prisoner until he arrives in Rome, and there he is initially a prisoner as well. In that position he must bear witness at the highest level, before the emperor, and after that he is a free man. That is what it comes down to.
It is a long route, but it is a picture of what has happened with the Gospel. It began in extremely problematic circumstances in Jerusalem and

eventually reached “the ends of the earth”. I was almost inclined to say: “the free world”. That is, in fact, correct. Jerusalem lies in Judea, which in practice was a province of Syria. Felix, who receives this greeting, had been appointed from Syria over that part of the Roman Empire. And so Paul is brought to a higher authority. It is an upward path: from Jerusalem to Caesarea and finally to Rome.
From verse 26 we finally learn who this commander is, whom we have already met several times. Claudius Lysias is the writer of this letter. He organised all these arrangements. Everyone seemed to be called Claudius in those days, for some reason. The name is translated as “lame”. It is hard to imagine anyone actually being called that. Apparently Claudius is simply a family name. In addition he is called Lysias, “the looser”, the liberator. Suddenly we find ourselves dealing with a “lame deliverer” who is speaking about the work of deliverance.
So the subject is salvation in our own days – a salvation that did not officially come to the Jewish people but to the Gentiles. That is what these chapters are all about. Claudius Lysias writes that the only dispute there is concerns their law. Paul is accused about “questions of their law”. But there is no accusation against him that would make him worthy of death or of bonds.
It is a religious matter, and he does not regard it as belonging to his jurisdiction, nor to anyone else’s. But the accusation has been lodged, a disturbance has arisen, and so Paul remains in custody – not on the basis of any concrete charge. That never becomes solid, not even in the following pages. Claudius Lysias knows this, and Felix and Festus also know there is nothing in it.
But there is, quite simply, “no room for Him in this world”. That is more or less how the New Testament begins. I am thinking of the Lord Jesus: there was no room for Him in the inn. There is no place for Paul in this world either, and so he is kept in custody at the highest level. Set apart. He did not belong. There is no concrete charge, but there is gossip. That is a devilish method, right up to our own day. If Satan cannot cause doctrinal confusion, he does it by means of slander. “He is not called the accuser of the brethren for nothing.” He is “the father of lies”. He brings false accusations. That is his occupation. It happens here, and it always happens. Peter, among others, writes in his letters that believers would be slandered, that purely out of hostility false accusations would be brought against them.

Acts 23 : 31–35
31 Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris.
32 On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle:
33 Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him.
34 And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia;

35 I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.
Paul is taken by night to Antipatris, a city built by Herod the Great and named after his father, Herod Antipas. “Antipas” means “in place of the father”. Antipatris is thought to be the same as Aphek in 1 Samuel 4, where the Philistines were encamped and in Aphek took possession of the Ark of the Covenant. There you have that same hostility. I should add that this is doubtful, because it is not stated in the Bible. Aphek had always been a fortress – that is what the name means as well. It lies halfway between Jerusalem and Caesarea, which is named after Julius Caesar, the emperor. But Paul has to go to the real city of the emperor: to Rome.
In Caesarea the letter is handed over and the prisoner is delivered. A great fuss is made of it, but in reality it is a kind of show. That is how I see it. It is a demonstration of the true state of the world. We learn from the Bible that the Gospel has been preached to all nations, but that generally speaking they want nothing to do with it. God has placed the world under judgment after the Gospel had been preached to the nations at the very highest level.
That is shown to us in this story of Paul, who is regarded as the personification of salvation and of the Church, and really even of the Lord Jesus Himself. Paul is a living letter.

Acts 24 : 1–5
1 And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.
2 And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence,
3 We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.
4 Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words.
5 For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes:
The high priest Ananias and the representatives of the Sanhedrin formed a kind of “parliamentary committee”. A voorspraak is a spokesman, a public speaker – an “orator” – who stands in front of the people to address them. This Tertullus (a diminutive of his real name, “Tertius”) is the one who has to speak on behalf of Ananias.
Being an orator was, and still is, a profession – just as we know the “preacher”, who is expected to be an orator. Brugman was a minister, an orator, and hence the saying “to talk like Brugman”. An orator is what you need when there is nothing to say, but it still has to be done well. Here too Tertullus uses splendid, polished sentences.
He is right in saying that an uproar had arisen. But it was not Paul who caused it. He was not the instigator. Simply the fact that they saw him was

enough to throw these people into such agitation that riots broke out. You can hardly hold Paul responsible for that – and yet that is what they do. Christianity has, from ancient times, been regarded as a Jewish sect. That is why people speak of a “Jewish–Christian culture” or “civilisation”, based on the Bible. But Jews and Christians have nothing in common. To the extent that there is common ground, those things do not really belong to Judaism, nor to Christianity. The Jews do not have the Messiah, and that is absolutely decisive for Jewish identity. It makes them hostile to Christians – at any rate in the book of Acts, as anyone can check.
“The sect of the Nazarenes” takes its name from Jesus of Nazareth, for that is simply the earthly title of the Lord Jesus. A sect is a split-off, a “section”, a breakaway group. The group of which Paul is called “a ringleader” was regarded as a Jewish sect, simply because a large part of the Christians were Jews. But people overlook the fact that Christianity in fact distances itself from Judaism. The essence of Christianity is to believe in the Lord Jesus as the Messiah foretold in the Old Testament. The adherents of Judaism very definitely do not believe that. You should therefore not mention these things in one breath, because that is quite wrong. The Romans did not know any better; they did not examine these religions.

Acts 24 : 6–13
6 Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law.
7 But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands,
8 Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him.
9 And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.
10 Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself:
11 Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship.
12 And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city:
13 Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.
To accuse someone of having “tried to profane the temple” is easily done. You only need to be a little inattentive or ignorant of the regulations, and you could already be accused of it. But of course that is not what happened here. On the contrary, Paul had made every effort not to do that. Out of respect for the temple he had, for this occasion, kept to Jewish ordinances. He had taken a Jewish vow and intended to offer the sacrifices that went with it.
These are false accusations – so serious, in fact, that they wanted to “judge” him, which in practice meant murder. If they had managed that, they would not have had to appear before Felix; they would not have

needed to trouble him. And so now Lysias is blamed, because he prevented them from “judging” Paul.
There is very little that is concrete in the charges themselves. Put yourself, for a moment, in Felix’s place. You know nothing, and they bring this whole spectacle before you. You would think: what a fuss! Perhaps it is precisely for that reason that Paul is allowed to speak. In that case it is quite interesting to hear why a man who has done nothing remarkable – neither positive nor negative – is transported with such a show of force and brought before Felix.
Paul simply explains what had happened. That it was only twelve days before that he had arrived in Jerusalem. So he had not had much time at all to stir up an uprising there. He argues that he has done absolutely nothing. He came only because of that vow he had taken, and nothing more. According to Paul, their accusations cannot be proved.

Acts 24 : 14
14 But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets:
Paul questions their use of the word “sect”. He does not dwell on it, but this “Way” is not a Jewish breakaway group. He says that they call it a sect, but he calls it “the Way”, the term that appears several times in Acts. It is the designation of what we call Christianity. “The Way” is what the apostle preached. It is a very apt term, because it really is about a way – in particular a roundabout way, as it is called in the Old Testament: the way the Lord goes, in accordance with everything that “the God of our fathers” has caused to be written in the Law and the Prophets.
Paul believes all of that, he says here. If we had the opportunity to bring the Gospel to Jews, they would find that what we believe is in harmony with the Law – including the fact that we do not live under the Law. That is the issue here, because these Jews accuse him of not keeping the Law and of preaching against it.
Paul does indeed preach that we are no longer under the Law, that we have been delivered from it. But that is not contrary to the Law; it is completely in line with it. The Law is carried through right to the end. Where the guilty party has been executed, there the Law ceases. Where mankind is reckoned as dead – because “one died for all” (2 Corinthians 5:15; Romans 6) – humanity is therefore no longer under the Law.
What matters is that people should believe everything that is written in the Law and the Prophets. Everything – not just a portion – with regard to past, present and future. The Lord reproached the disciples on the road to Emmaus: “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken” (Luke 24:25). In Acts, too, the emphasis lies on that same thought.

Acts 24 : 15
15 And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.
Notes – UK English rendering

The Jews themselves have hope in God. Paul does not deny that. The real issue, however, is the resurrection from the dead. What use is religion if there is no resurrection? What is left then? Those few years that we spend here? The real future lies beyond death, in the resurrection.
Here it is a matter of resurrections of different kinds – that is how the Bible describes them – but they do indeed take place at the same time. We find the same thought elsewhere in Scripture. The Lord Jesus says:
John 5:28–29
28 “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,
29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”
“His voice” is the voice of the Son of Man, who is the Son of God, as the previous verses show. At that “hearing” they will come out of the graves and thus out of death. In the Bible, “doing good” is: believing. It is only logical that they have “a resurrection of life”. In contrast stands unbelief – those “that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation”.
This is a reference to the “last day” in Revelation 20: “I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God”. All of them, in other words. Whoever is written in “the book of life” is well off; the others disappear once more into death. That is “the second death”, and that is final.
That all will rise is also implied in:
Philippians 2:10
“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.”
Here “those under the earth” – that is, in the realm of the dead – are explicitly mentioned. “Every knee” means that not only believers, but also unbelievers will rise and then bow the knee before the Lord Jesus Christ. Believers are expected “to rise unto life”, for they receive an immortal and eternal body, a glorified body. Those who rise “to the resurrection of damnation” obviously do not rise in a glorified body. They are brought before God and then dismissed again.
In the Old Testament the two different “sorts” of resurrection are named in:
Daniel 12:2
“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”
This speaks about the future. However you place that verse in relation to New Testament believers, it clearly says there will be a resurrection – on the one hand to life, on the other hand to “shame” or “everlasting contempt”. Again, it means that all those concerned (“many”) will at some point rise (“awake”) and take part in two different kinds of resurrection.
People sometimes say that Paul mentions the resurrection here in order to sow division. I think he mentions it simply because it is the very heart of the message. That is where everything begins. And from there a person ought to make the right choice. The Word of God is confrontational, because it calls us to choose for the Lord. One must choose before one passes from life into death.

Acts 24 : 16-21
16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void to offence toward God, and toward men.
17 Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings.
18 Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult.
19 Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me.
20 Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council,
21 Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.
“Void of offence” means that you try not to put a stumbling block in someone else’s way. One can train oneself “to have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men”.
Paul conforms himself to Jewish principles. He says that he was occupied with such things when he was “found” by certain Jews from Asia. At that moment there was no riot, no “tumult”. Nothing at all was going on. And even then, it was Jews from Asia, not even from Jerusalem itself.
Those Jews from Asia recognised him. According to the Law they were the ones who ought to have brought accusations. But they were not present on this occasion. These here were Jews from Jerusalem. So the whole procedure was actually contrary to the rules.
In the end, Paul says, the whole conflict revolves around the resurrection of the dead. That is what he is being judged for. Here he is giving his account of what happened when he appeared before the Sanhedrin, after his arrest in Jerusalem. In 23:6 he had said: “I am called in question for the hope and resurrection of the dead.” After that, the quarrel broke out between them.
Paul is saying that the only disturbance he has caused was that one in the Sanhedrin. And there it already became clear that the Jewish council “had no case” against him – and they still don’t.

Acts 24 : 22-25
22 And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter.
23 And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him.
24 And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.
25 And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

For the moment, this is the end of the hearing. Paul immediately receives a little more freedom, and that is characteristic of his later imprisonment in Rome as well.
Felix will already have known something about this whole affair. He probably had some knowledge of both Judaism and Christianity. Felix was married to Drusilla, a Jewess. She was the sister of Bernice (Acts 25:13); they were sisters of King Agrippa (Acts 25–26). So the apostle Paul is preaching the Gospel at the very highest level. In this way the Gospel is still officially proclaimed to the Jewish people, to the Jewish royal house. On this occasion Felix and his wife are given a thorough explanation of the Gospel. The subject is not “Paul’s case”, the reason why he is in prison, but “the faith in Christ” – and that during a private visit with Felix and Drusilla. It becomes a personal matter.
Paul explains that people should believe in the Messiah, the One raised from the dead. In that connection he speaks about righteousness, temperance (living with restraint) and the judgment to come – about past, present and future.
We are to live soberly, with self-control, in this present world – that is the “now”. God reveals His righteousness in the Bible; that is what the Gospel is about. God is righteous when He does not impute sin to you and me, but forgives it. That is just, because those sins have already received their righteous recompense in the death of the Lord Jesus. It is justice – and at the same time grace, because it is not our achievement. We have received it “freely” (Romans 3:24). The righteousness of God is demonstrated, established and proclaimed through His death and resurrection.

Acts 24 : 26-27
26 He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.
27 But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

It appears that Felix was waiting for money from Paul in order to release him. He gave Paul the opportunity to make him an offer. In any case, we read that he talked with Paul frequently. That means that for “two years” Paul repeatedly preached the Gospel to Felix.
Then Felix – whose name is related to “felicitated” or “happy” – is replaced by Festus, whose name means “festive”. Paul goes from bad to worse, because at the end of his term Felix plays politics and wants to do the Jews a favour. Even after two years without a trial he leaves Paul in prison. Festus, the governor of Syria, has the same tendency, as we read afterwards. At that point Paul has had enough and says, in effect: you may wish to hand me over to the Jews to please them, but I appeal unto Caesar. I am a Roman citizen. (That part follows in chapter 25.)

Acts 25 : 1-7
1 Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he

ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem.
2 Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him,
3 And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.
4 But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither.
5 Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.
6 And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought.
7 And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.
“The chief men of the Jews” see the arrival of Festus as an opportunity to get rid of Paul. They ask Festus to send Paul to Jerusalem for trial, so that they can ambush him on the way and murder him. That had been the plan earlier as well.
But instead, Festus comes himself to Caesarea to hear the charges from those who had travelled from Jerusalem to there. Sitting on “the judgment seat” he listens to “many and grievous accusations” against Paul – but they are unsupported. There is no proof. And then Paul also has his own side to tell.

Acts 25 : 8-11
8 While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all.
9 But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?
10 Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest.
11 For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar.

The reference to “against the temple” goes back to the original charge: that he had defiled the temple by bringing Gentiles into it. But that simply was not the case. So Paul clears himself of that.
Festus, however, wants to do the Jews a favour and proposes to continue the case in Jerusalem. But Paul knows that this would mean his death. He sees straight through it and immediately appeals to a higher court. He calls upon the highest authority of all: the emperor. As a Roman citizen he has the right to do that.
Here, then, we see Paul presented very strongly as a Gentile, certainly not as a Jew. The Jews are his opponents – a subject that will be explored at length in the following chapters. In Paul’s eyes it is now enough as far as

the Jews are concerned. It is time to turn to the Gentiles, and to appeal to the emperor, for that is where the story that began in Jerusalem will now continue.
We see three “defences” given by Paul: before the Christian congregation, before the Jewish people, and before the Jewish high council. After that, three in Caesarea – officially the seat of the governor of Syria – which I take as representing the ten tribes: first before Felix, then before Festus, and finally formally before Agrippa. Three times Judea, three times Syria – and then, in Acts 27, we arrive among the Gentiles in general, at the emperor of the great Roman world empire.
You need to recognise the systematic structure here. At first the emphasis lies on the proclamation of the Gospel to the people. Here, the focus is on preaching to kings, those who officially and “in law” represent the whole people. It is the order in which the Gospel was officially proclaimed: first to Judea (the two tribes, the Jews), then to the ten tribes, and finally to the nations.

Acts 25 : 12-21
12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.
13 And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus.
14 And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix:
15 About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him.
16 To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.
17 Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth.
18 Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed:
19 But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.
20 And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters.
21 But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar.
It is Paul’s legal right to go to the emperor. The Jews have to accept that as well. The striking thing, of course, is that it was indeed God’s intention that the apostle should go to that emperor – and in this way it is arranged.
In verse 19 Festus speaks of “one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.” He has understood that part very well.

Acts 25 : 22-27
22 Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To

morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him.
23 And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.
24 And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer.
25 But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him.
26 Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write.
27 For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.
Festus has to send Paul to the emperor with a covering letter, but he does not know what to write in it. After this, Agrippa – king of the Jews – is given the floor as the guest of honour.

Acts 26 : 1-7
1 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself:
2 I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews:
3 Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.
4 My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews;
5 Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.
6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God, unto our fathers:
7 Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.
So Paul was well known among the people of his generation. Within Judaism he “profited in the Jews’ religion above many” of his contemporaries (Galatians 1:14). In his generation he was the man – and all the Jews know it, he says.
Paul had lived as a Pharisee. That was orthodox, the strictest and most faithful adherence to the old Jewish tradition. “And now,” he says in verse 6, “I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers.”

I suspect Luther also knew this verse when he stood before the Diet of Worms and said: “Here I stand; I can do no other.” He had gone there more or less voluntarily.
“Hope” and “promise” in the phrase “the hope of the promise” are really synonyms. Both speak of future expectation. The promises to the Jewish fathers point back to former generations.
Paul knew that the Jews represented only the two tribes of Israel, but he speaks of “our twelve tribes”. He makes a statement that includes both the two and the ten tribes. Paul knows those ten tribes – otherwise he could not put it this way. He knows who they are.
The fact that no one stumbles over this mention of the twelve tribes may be because not only Paul but also Agrippa and Festus know exactly whom he is talking about. Apparently everybody knew this, and knew where they were, so there is no contradiction. Even if they were not known under the name “Israel”, they were known under various other names.
These are those who are “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel”, as Paul puts it in Ephesians 2:12, and in Colossians 1:21: “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled.” “Once alienated” implies that they had previously not been alien to the citizenship of Israel, but that at some point they became so.
Here we also read that those who “were alienated” are now “reconciled”, and therefore no longer alienated. They have again obtained a share in “the commonwealth of Israel”.
The Jews expect the coming of the Messiah, and with Him the restoration of the Israelite nation in its full number of twelve tribes, not only the Jewish people. James, “the Lord’s brother”, sent a letter “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” – he must have known who they were and where they lived; otherwise you cannot send them a letter. It has to be deliverable.
In Matthew 19, in the story of the rich young man, the Lord says: “Ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Nobody asks: “What twelve tribes?” There is no need, because they knew where these people lived. The same is true for those at the Last Supper in Luke 22, when the Lord Jesus says: “That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”
To my mind it is clear that these people knew who the ten tribes were. That is the reason why nothing special is said about them. If everyone knows it anyway, there is no need to explain it. We have forgotten it for one reason or another, but in the Bible they have not. They are simply followed through history – and that can still be traced.
Paul knew very well who and where those other tribes were, and that in their religion there is a Messianic expectation of the coming of a Redeemer. According to the historical reconstruction, he visited them – starting in the British royal palace in Rome and thus with the highest authority among the ten tribes, the British monarch.

Acts 26 : 8-16
8 Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should

raise the dead?
9 I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.
10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.
11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.
12 Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,
13 At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.
14 And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.
15 And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.
16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee.
This had already been promised to Abraham, of whom it is said in Romans 4:17 that he believed “God, who quickeneth the dead…”. God gives new life; God creates a new creation – and therefore He raises the dead. First of all the Lord Jesus, for that is what this is ultimately about in brief.
Paul asks here, rhetorically: do you consider it impossible that God should fulfil His promises?
He then recounts his earlier actions against “the name of Jesus of Nazareth” and his conversion by the Lord Himself, who revealed Himself to him. That explains his changed position, but it also proves the resurrection of Christ, for that is the crux of the matter.
It is Paul who asks: “Who art thou, Lord?” That is the right question, for it is on that basis that the Lord makes Himself known. That is always the way of things in the Bible. The answer to Paul’s question brings us straight to the resurrection: “I am Jesus.”
Paul too is “set upright”. Then he is appointed “a minister and a witness of these things”. He is to be a witness of the Lord, just as the apostles were in Acts 1. That is only possible if he has seen the living Jesus. One can only bear witness to what one has personally observed.
Paul has just seen the Lord – and the Lord will appear to him again. Relatively soon afterwards, the Lord appears to Paul on Mount Sinai in Arabia (Galatians 1 and 3). There he is caught up “to the third heaven”, that is, “the paradise of God” (2 Corinthians 12:2, 4).

Acts 26:17–18
17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,

18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.
Deliverance means being rescued out of this present evil world, and being delivered from both Judaism and heathenism. You can see straightaway that not only at the beginning of Paul's calling, but already in Acts 2, there is talk of being delivered from this people. That implies that the preaching of the Gospel was not an internal Jewish matter, as ultra-dispensationalists claim – as though it were exclusively for the Jews and concerned only a Jewish kingdom.
The preaching was in fact: "Save yourselves from this untoward generation." The Lord was doing something outside the camp. (Hebrews 13:13.) Paul is sent "to this people and to the Gentiles" – in that order. Everywhere Paul went he preached first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles, so that they might share in the light – the deliverance that is in Christ Jesus.
From this it is clear that the nations are not ignorant of the Gospel. That matters, because this whole issue concerns the righteousness of God. (Enduring Word) Here the apostle appears before high officials, and especially before the representative leader of the Jewish people. Agrippa does not represent the religious aspect of the nation, but the nation as such. The religious side is dealt with later in the story – and that proves just as rejecting.
Both Jews and Gentiles are to have their eyes opened and to "turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God". Then a person is delivered from "this present evil age". From Satan, in fact – for he is "the god of this world" and the ruler of this age. (Ephesians 2:2; 6:12.) He rules the world. That also means that the world lies in darkness; otherwise you could not be turned from it. Where the world lies in darkness, people are turned to the light and placed outside that realm. Satan's power consists, in practice, in darkness – in ignorance.
Light comes from God – or, as John puts it even more strongly: "God is light." (1 John 1:5.) When one turns to God, one comes into the light; so there is light only among those who believe. There you learn the truth, come to understand it, and walk in it. In that position one receives forgiveness. That is what the verse says. He has drawn us – the Church – out of this present evil age and placed us in "the age to come", the kingdom of Christ. In Ephesians 5:14 we read: "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." (An echo of Isaiah 60:1.) We are to walk in the light and bear fruit.
Paul is appointed "for a light to the ends of the earth", so that Jews and Gentiles might come to the knowledge of Christ and the power of His resurrection. That also means turning away from the darkness and thus from the devil. "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:7.) And again: "how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." (1 Thessalonians 1:9.)
All this is only "through faith in Me", as verse 18 says. Only through faith in the Lord Jesus does one receive forgiveness of sins and "an inheritance among them which are sanctified". We are born again "unto an

inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." (1 Peter 1:4.) That is about a possession in the New Creation. That is what was to be preached. It is Paul's commission – and that of many others who received the same commission. The disciples, much earlier, had already been told: "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me… unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8.)
So there is not, at this point, a special status of Paul above others. What is special is that the history is worked out through him, and that we have most of the New Testament letters through his ministry. That is because the man is also a model of the Church – not of Jewish but of Gentile background. He did have a Jewish upbringing, but he was a Gentile with Roman citizenship.

Acts 26:19–23
19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:
20 But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.
21 For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.
22 Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come:
23 That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles. (Bible Hub)
Paul explains that it is precisely because of the Lord Jesus Himself that he "was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision". In Acts 3:19 Peter says: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted." The same two ideas together, just as here. In both cases it is a call to repentance towards God. John the Baptist preached exactly the same in Luke 3:8: "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance."
Paul is therefore not preaching a different gospel. New birth, in itself, is not the goal; it is a means. The goal is that we, as God's creatures, should serve God. For that purpose He enables us. We are turned from idols to serve the living God. Saved by grace unto good works, in which we should walk. The virtues of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9) should be expressed in our whole life.
That is what Paul has done. He gives the whole sequence: Damascus, where he first went; then Jerusalem; then Judaea; then the Gentiles. It is because of this work that the Jews tried to silence him. Literally, they "went about to kill" him. But through the help of God he was able, "unto this day", to testify to everyone – small and great – about the things the prophets and Moses had spoken concerning the future.
Among other things, that the Christ must suffer. Peter says:
"Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently… searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in

them did signify… when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” (1 Peter 1:10–11.)
In my view, there is no Old Testament passage that explicitly states: “the Christ shall suffer”. They are conclusions you have to draw. For example, Isaiah 53 speaks of “a lamb dumb before his shearers”, but it does not actually say there that this is Christ – you can show that it speaks of Israel. That passage has a double layer: it concerns the Messiah, but also more than that.
People also refer to the Psalms – which are, in fact, all Messianic. In Psalm 16 David speaks of suffering unto death. Peter quotes this in Acts 2 and says that, though David wrote it, it is not really about David but about the Son who would come from his loins. Peter adds that David knew this: “And seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ.” Many Psalms speak of Christ’s sufferings. Even though it is not made explicit in each case, you would have to be blind not to see it.
So there need be no doubt: the Christ had to suffer and then rise from the dead as the Firstfruits. This “first that should rise from the dead” would show light “unto the people and to the Gentiles”. That is still happening in our own day.

Acts 26:24–27
24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.
25 But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.
26 For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.
27 King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.
Paul is giving his defence. He explains what position he was in and how it has all come about. Then Festus suddenly bursts in, loudly shouting that Paul is completely out of his mind. “Raving” is the word – it can also mean “raving” in the sense of delirious talk when someone is not fully in their senses, for example when they have a high fever. Another related word would be “racing”: going too fast, being over-wrought.
According to Festus, Paul’s “much learning” has driven him insane. Great learning and madness can indeed sometimes be close together. Paul answers Festus very briefly and then turns straight to Agrippa. In effect he says to Festus: I am not really speaking to you, but to Agrippa – and he knows what I am talking about.
Paul assumes (“I am persuaded”) that these things are not hidden from Agrippa. Not least because they did not happen secretly somewhere “in a corner”, but in public. Agrippa, as king of the Jews, will certainly have known about all these matters, and also about Paul’s past. Agrippa is expected to believe the Scriptures, and therefore this message is preached to him.

Acts 26:28–32

28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.
29 And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.
30 And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them:
31 And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.
32 Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.
Agrippa only had to take one more step – but he did not. This failure to come to faith is the thread running through these chapters. Paul is given the opportunity to address the official representatives of the nations – and here even the official representative of the Jewish people – but they do not come to faith.
In verse 29 “were” really means “would become”: that they would become such as I am – that is, Christians. For that is the word just used. “Except these bonds” – not prisoners as he is, but free. That is what Paul longs for.
Then, quite literally, “the story ends”. It’s one of the advantages of being a king: you just get up and walk away – and the session is over. Afterwards the whole company discuss the matter and conclude: “This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.” Agrippa declares the case “inadmissible”, as we would say today. Paul could at once have been set free, were it not that “he had appealed unto Caesar”. Because of that Agrippa effectively has no say in his release, and it is decided that they will sail to Italy.
Paul is now on his way to the emperor – but that journey itself fills an entire chapter. What happens on the way is a picture of our present dispensation: not only its turbulent beginnings, but also the turmoil that followed. This does not only refer to the persecutions of Christians in the first centuries. The Christian faith was annexed by the Roman Empire and turned into a state religion; after that, the persecutions ceased.
Christianity was suddenly recognised as a religion and given a place in the world, whereas Christians are in fact meant to have their place outside the world. There, in my view, it went badly wrong. I believe that was the greatest misstep in the entire history of our dispensation.
Where Christians are persecuted in this age, it is generally because they withdraw themselves from the existing social and religious structures.

Acts 27:1–5
1 And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band.
2 And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.
3 And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.

4 And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.
5 And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia.
Luke – the one traditionally regarded as the author of this book – is suddenly “on board” again: he starts writing “we”. The prisoners are handed over to the centurion, who is responsible for them. This centurion allows Paul to be cared for by the brothers. Together they embark on “a ship of Adramyttium”. Adramyttium lies on the west coast of Asia Minor. It is essentially a Greek ship, for Adramyttium was an Athenian colony.
The name “Aristarchus” can be translated along the lines of “the best of the rulers” or “first among the leaders” – the name appears a few times in the New Testament. Travelling from Caesarea to Sidon is just a short hop to the north. We know Sidon from the widow of Zarephath – Sarepta of Sidon (Luke 4:26). That story is prophetic of the ten tribes. When the Gospel is rejected by the Jews, it goes to Sarepta, near Sidon. So I am not at all surprised that Sidon is mentioned here. You cannot prove anything with it, but it is striking that it comes up – just as Cyprus is mentioned, along with the opposing winds.
Whenever one comes close to Judaism and Jewish culture, one meets headwinds. This is pictured earlier in the sorcerer Elymas (Acts 13). There is no room there for the Gospel, and Paul does not go ashore.
“Myra” means “myrrh” and is a picture of resurrection. Myrrh is associated with the birthright of the firstborn. We know myrrh from the gifts of “gold, frankincense and myrrh” brought by the wise men from the East. Those three gifts are roughly synonymous: gold speaks of kingship; frankincense, of priesthood; myrrh, of death and therefore of resurrection, being a burial spice. Myrrh also appears in John 19, in connection with the anointing of the Lord Jesus. When He is anointed, it points to His rising from the dead and receiving the Spirit. Myra, then, is a picture of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 27:6–13
6 And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein.
7 And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone;
8 And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea.
9 Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them,
10 And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.
11 Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul.
12 And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to

Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west.
13 And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete.
Now they transfer to a ship from Alexandria, the capital of Egypt since the days of the Greek empire. That immediately calls to mind the story of Joseph in Egypt, and all that is connected with that. The journey is not only slow – the narrative itself is also told slowly, so that these associations naturally arise.
“Cnidus” is the tip of the little peninsula – and they barely get there. They hardly make any headway. (Today you can cover that stretch in a tourist boat in a couple of hours.) They had planned to reach Cnidus, but never actually got there. Instead they turned southward to Salmone, probably a point on the north-east side of Crete. Salmone is a cape, regarded as dangerous. They just about get round it; otherwise they would have run aground. They “hardly passing it” and then reach “Fair Havens” – a good harbour – near the city of Lasea.
“Lasea” means something like “a cleft” or “a ravine” – in Norway you would call it a fjord. A kind of “Rock of Ages”. Their plans are not working out; they keep ending up somewhere other than where they intended – but still, they do arrive at good places. That is the pattern here: very little comes of the route they choose, but they do end up somewhere, usually somewhere good, and that is what really matters.
The whole thing takes longer than expected – and that is very much like our own dispensation. Paul, who stands for the Church and for the work of the Lord, effectively says: it will go badly with this ship and with our lives. The centurion, the sailing master and the majority on board do not accept that, and the course is changed towards Phoenix in Crete, where they hope to spend the winter. To do that, they must take the sailing-ship out from under the shelter of the coast.
Because the “south wind blew softly”, they thought it would be all right. They sail as close as possible along Crete – first towards the south-west and then towards the north-west, to reach their destination. That last stretch is north-west, and I find it striking that this is mentioned. The Gospel would eventually be brought to the north and the west – ultimately to the north-west of Europe. That is what it is really about: events that took place on a large scale in history are pictured here in miniature.

Acts 27:14–16
14 But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon.
15 And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive.
16 And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat:
Soon they are hit by “a tempestuous wind” – in effect, a strong north-easterly. They would have needed to turn back north to reach that harbour after all, but that is out of the question. They cannot stand against this storm. “We let her drive” – they give up trying to steer.

“Clauda” literally means “shut in”, “enclosed” – you might think of “claustrophobia”. The ship is almost beyond their control. They are carried along, and they will reach somewhere in the end, but it is no longer manageable. Remember that.
When the disciples were in the boat and a storm broke out, the same thing happened: the boat became unmanageable. There was nothing they could do. It is the same in the story of Jonah, who is sent to bring the message of God to Nineveh, the firstborn among the nations. He does not have control over events either and ends up in shipwreck. Things cannot be steered by human effort, and yet they reach the right end because God’s hand is in it – not thanks to human management but in spite of it. Remember that, because it is absolutely vital. Live with that in mind, also for your own life. Do not imagine that you can keep everything under control. You are certainly responsible, but you are not in control. So what do you do with the “talent” or “pound” entrusted to you? You entrust it to the bank. (Luke 19.) What do we do with the deposit entrusted to us? We commit it to the Lord; He is able to keep it against that day. (2 Timothy 1:12.) What do we do with our life? We give it to the Lord, and He will make something of it.
If we think that we can steer everything ourselves, we are mistaken. We should simply do what lies on our path, running the race set before us (Hebrews 12:1), but the direction, ultimately, is not in our hands. That is what is illustrated here – and also in the wider history. “We could hardly get control of the boat,” says Luke.

Acts 27:17–21
17 Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven.
18 And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship;
19 And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.
20 And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.
21 But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.
Apparently they pass cables or ropes underneath the hull to fasten it together more firmly, because they are afraid the ship will break apart. They “undergird” it and thus reinforce it. They do everything they can to hold the ship together.
Throughout the centuries people have tried to preserve the outward form and outward unity of Christendom. Sometimes I think the Lord Himself ensures that it all breaks up – simply because, in itself, it is not what matters. Outward forms are not the point. What matters is that believers are one in Christ. We are “of one mind” according to Christ Jesus. (Romans 15:5.) That has nothing to do with outward structures and organisation. It is not about the ship, but about the people on board. They are not truly

dependent on the ship; if it breaks up, they will still be saved. They simply walk out of the boat – if need be, over the water.
“Syrtis” is a sandbank, like the Dogger Bank – a dangerous shallow. They lose all sense of direction – that is the practical reality. With no sail up, and no steering, they are adrift. That cannot end well – and on the third day they throw the ship’s equipment overboard with their own hands, so that the ship will be less burdened. Everything not immediately essential is thrown out.
But the situation does not improve “for many days”. It remains dark; there is no “outlook” of any kind. It stays dark. As for the “long time without food”, I cannot fully explain it, because later it appears that there is still food on board, even fourteen days later. In any case, they are in dire straits – and then Paul stands up.
If you ask me, Cyprus stands for the two tribes and Crete for the ten tribes of Israel. According to Paul they should have remained there. If you project that into history, you might say: the Gospel should have remained in England – if they had not exported it, they would not afterwards have met with so many complications. That is the line of thought here.

Acts 27:22–27
22 And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.
23 For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve,
24 Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.
25 Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.
26 Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.
27 But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country;
The focus is on the people in the ship. They are destined to arrive, alive and well, at the appointed destination with Paul. There is still work for them to do there.
“The angel of God” is the Angel of the Lord – Christ Himself – who had already promised that He would appear to Paul again. He says: “Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar.” That must happen; therefore nothing can happen to him. Paul believes that. He trusts that word, just as David did when he looked at Goliath.
The expression “God hath given thee all them that sail with thee” is a picture of the whole Church travelling with Paul, as a type of Christ, at its head. Paul is once more the example and personification of the Church as such.
“A certain island” is another island – but it does not change the course of God’s plan. They must be cast upon “an island”. Naturally this points us to the islands in the west – “the isles of the sea”, to which the light was to be brought, according to Acts 13. They end up on Malta, which for a long time was under British rule. That is no surprise.

The term “Adriatic sea” is probably used in a broader sense, including the southern part. Scripture never speaks of the “Mediterranean Sea”; it simply says “the sea” or “the western sea” – it is the same. There they are tossed “up and down”, backwards and forwards. Meanwhile the ship is approaching land, which the sailors regard as dangerous.

Acts 27:28–29
28 And they sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms.
29 Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day. metres. The water becomes increasingly shallow, so everything is halted by lowering four anchors. After that it becomes simply a matter of waiting “for day to come.”
This is not merely the story of a shipwreck. There is a deeper meaning, and the text gives us hints. The account of the shipwreck is a portrayal of the history of Christendom. That situation is vividly described in verse 29. When we read “twenty”, we may think of the two thousand years of our present dispensation, and also of the twenty years Jacob spent with Laban. When we read “fourteen” (in verse 27), we may be reminded of the fourteen years Jacob laboured to obtain his two wives (sisters). These numbers bring associations.
Concerning the four anchors, the picture matches Christendom over the past few centuries. There is fear that everything will go wrong, and so people seek earthly security. They try to ground themselves firmly—naturally with the number four, for “four” represents earthly things. They fasten themselves to earth; Christendom becomes settled in earthly structures.
After the Reformation, Protestantism also sought and found the support of governments and earthly powers. It again became “established upon the earth”. This is one aspect in which the work of the Reformation can be said to be “not found perfect before God.” (Revelation 3:2.)
The Catholic Church was annexed by Emperor Constantine, and from that time onward we have a Roman Catholic Church—firmly rooted in the earth. In our own day, the same happens among those who call themselves evangelical or free-church. Earthly principles are applied—human methods borrowed from commerce and business. With “four anchors” they attach themselves to the earth, and then simply wait: perhaps for the Last Day, or for the coming of the Messiah.
Thus it went with the Reformation: everything firmly fixed, neatly written in confessional standards, waiting from an earthly position “until the day dawns”. It becomes a caricature of Christianity in which we try to preserve everything—where nothing must ever change.

Acts 27:30–35
30 And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship,
31 Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the

ship, ye cannot be saved.
32 Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.
33 And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.
34 Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.
35 And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat.
Suddenly there appear to be two vessels. The ropes of the lifeboat are cut. The stern of the main ship is anchored. When they attempt to anchor the bow as well, Paul intervenes. He tells the centurion, “If you do that, you will lose everything. You cannot be saved.” They listen to him this time. Then it becomes day—always a type of the dawn of the New Covenant. They eat food that was already on board. This is not a formal celebration of the Lord’s Supper; but practically, what difference does it make? A meal always symbolises life and fellowship. I see no reason why it should have any other meaning here—certainly not when those gathered represent the Church as a whole.
Notice: “He took bread, gave thanks, and broke it.” (Luke 22:19.) All three ideas appear in verse 35. That is enough to remind us of what we call “the institution of Holy Communion”. The theme is life and fellowship. All who are in the ship form a community and are all saved. They are all given life, and the meal symbolises that.
It is a picture of the Lord caring for us. He is understood to be the One who gives the bread and distributes the wine. At the end of this shipwreck narrative, we see that the Lord cares for us—just as He cared for that company in the boat. They ate and drank, and evidently the weather had calmed.

Acts 27:36–38
36 Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat.
37 And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls.
38 And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.
Their courage returns. “We are always confident,” says Paul elsewhere, “while we look not at the things which are seen.” What we see passes away—it is temporary. But the unseen things are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:18.) They remain. They do not change.
Paul gave the example. He began to eat, so they did likewise. That is normal practice. It is the pattern of the New Testament letters: Paul sets himself as an example, and we should all be imitators of him. (1 Corinthians 11:1.)
Once the meal (the fellowship) is shared, those in the ship are numbered. It is determined who belongs and who does not. All who eat belong. Those who partake of Christ—illustrated here with Paul as a type of Christ.
But why are we told that “there were 276 souls” on board? A pregnancy lasts 276 days. That is not far from our subject. Here the issue is the birth

of the Church—not its beginning, but its completion. The birth of the Church as such (Revelation 12).
Through the number “276”, which equals the numerical value of kikayon, we arrive at Jonah 4, and Nineveh—meaning “double-son”, the son with the birthright. Nineveh more specifically pictures the ten tribes in the world. The Gospel reached them, and there it found response. Judgment was to come—but the judgement did not arrive, because Nineveh repented. Light shone instead.
Through the dove (Jonah), through the Spirit, through the power of God, through a shipwreck—by such an unlikely route—the Gospel reached those people, and the inhabitants of Nineveh repented. Astonishing!
The book of Jonah concerns the origin of the Church—a people of the New Covenant. From or near Nineveh arises a “miracle plant” (the twice-born), symbolising a people. The Lord Jesus applies “the sign of Jonah” to Himself, and therefore also to the Church.
Leather also has the numerical value 276. Then we come to Peter, or Simon the tanner—one finds them together—and everything connected with that story. Then to the apostle Paul, a maker of tents, which were made of leather. Leather is a “second skin”—an image of new birth. The beast is gone; something else now dwells within. Or someone now lives within, if we speak of a tent.
All of this relates to the Church. Here we see how truths concerning the Church are often veiled—even in the New Testament. They are there, established, but only someone who searches with interest finds them.

Acts 27:39–44
39 And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.
40 And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.
41 And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.
42 And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.
43 But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land:
44 And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.
They must land somewhere. They are not on the sandbank but near land—though they only recognise this when day arrives. I find the expression beautiful: “When it was day, they knew not the land.” That is exactly how things often go, repeatedly in Scripture. So it is with us: we are journeying toward a land unknown—yet we already possess citizenship of it.

How they managed it, we do not know, but they headed toward the inlet with a shore. The bow (the lifeboat) remained fast and immovable, but the stern (Christendom) “broke apart by the violence of the waves.” Apparently the normal practice was to kill prisoners when disaster struck, to prevent escape. But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, forbade it—and thus all 276 souls arrived safely in the land they did not know.

Acts 28:1–6
1 And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.
2 And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.
3 And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.
4 And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.
5 And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.
6 Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.
“Melite” is Malta—translated as “escape”, “deliverance”, or “rescue”. The name is very fitting. The Phoenicians are thought to have given it this name; the island, south of Sicily, served as a refuge, perhaps because of weather conditions.
We use “barbarians” to mean “uncivilised”, but here it refers to those outside our culture. In Roman times, anyone not belonging to Roman civilisation was called a “barbarian”. Despite Roman rule, the Maltese evidently maintained their own customs and ways of life. “Common” means “ordinary”, “usual”, “normal”. They therefore welcomed the shipwrecked company with exceptional kindness. They wished to winter there; the weather was harsh, yet they were warmly received and gathered around a great fire.
Then Paul is bitten by a venomous snake, but suffers no harm, despite their gloomy expectations. He is not even troubled by it. All this confirms the central message: the Church finds a home somewhere on an island—outside the Roman world, outside Greek culture.
It is a remarkable story. They arrive on an isolated island, with no contact with the outside world. The prisoners and soldiers are welcomed and honoured. Here they escape the serpent. The snake (often a dragon in many stories) is defeated again. As so often, the scene is by the water or with the sea in view.
That they eventually call Paul a god is not far from the truth of the picture: Paul represents Christ; and then Christ together with the whole Church of which the Lord says, “I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18.) Thus they survive the shipwreck—and Paul survives the serpent bite.

Acts 28:7–9
7 In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously.
8 And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.
9 So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed.
The man who “lodged them courteously for three days” is the leader of the people of the island. He, as the highest authority, represents the nation of that island, and so he bears the Latin name Publius. The name has the same root as the word for “the people” or “the public”. Paul and his companions were therefore received by the people themselves, through their representative, for three days.
The text is written by Luke, the physician in the company. The term “bloody flux” is a medical expression, and to this day I am unsure of its precise meaning. Here we are dealing with “the man with the issue of blood”. We already know the account of the woman with the issue of blood in the days of the Lord Jesus (Luke 8). That earlier story helps to explain this one entirely.
Publius, the head of the people, has a father. He is in fact the true head—the source from which everything has come—yet that origin is barren, “bleeding”. Officially he is unfruitful. Paul prays, lays his hands upon him, and heals him. That is the turning point.
The islanders represent the Ten Tribes of Israel. The father of Publius symbolises Joseph—he to whom the birthright was promised, yet from whom up to that point nothing had come. Now, in our present day, that promise bears fruit. Salvation reaches the governing authority, the royal house, and from there spreads to the people.
Meanwhile the Jews seize Paul and seek to kill him, and through these events he arrives on this island. Malta represents the Ten Tribes of Israel: the “other nation” to whom the Gospel is welcomed, and which becomes the home base of Christianity. (Matthew 21:43)

Acts 28:10–12
10 Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.
11 And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux.
12 And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days.
They provided everything we needed. In Scripture, to “honour” means to reward. Honour is honor in English; an “honorarium” is therefore simply honour given in material form. In 1 Timothy 5:3, widows are to be honoured—meaning they receive financial support for their needs. Honour in the Bible is something tangible. So they were supplied with provisions for the journey.
Everything in these chapters unfolds “after three”. Three days, three nights, and now three months. It is the fixed pattern: “after three” or “on

the third”. It always relates to this dispensation. Primarily it signifies the fulfilment of God’s promises. What has been promised—what must come—does come. It is fulfilled in its appointed time. So also here.
Alexandria means Egypt, the first of the great “biblical world-empires.” Salvation history begins with slavery in Egypt. From Malta, Syracuse lies almost directly north, on the eastern side of Sicily.
Normally this is rendered “Castor and Pollux”. They are also known as Apollo and Hercules. The twins sailed with the Argonauts under the leadership of Joshua—but he bore a Greek name then: Jason, known as the captain of the ship. We know the ship under Paul’s leadership, and another ship under Joseph and the Twelve. How many Argonauts were there in the legends? The tradition varies, but I recall twelve—including this twin pair.
They sailed across the wild seas in search of “the Golden Fleece”—the golden sheepskin. They desired to be clothed with gold, the robe of a sheep. This imagery is remarkably close to biblical symbolism: humanity is to be “clothed with the garment of Christ”—His righteousness. That is the garment of the Lamb. The Lord is presented as a Lamb, and that righteousness is eternal—thus it is gold. One wonders how people conceived of a golden sheepskin except through such symbolism: the search for eternal life. They might equally have sought the philosopher’s stone, the elixir of life, or whatever else one calls it—the source of eternal life. Yet the answer is Christ; the myth itself is a picture pointing toward Him.
The ship bore the sign of “Castor and Pollux”—twins. They were considered the patron deities of sailors. Even if one knows nothing of Greek mythology, if you simply read “twins”, you immediately understand the symbol: two, yet one. “Two” is repeatedly a figure of the Church—one body expressed in two. The firstborn receives a double portion.
In Scripture the firstborn is often represented by twins—Esau and Jacob; Ephraim and Manasseh. Through the sign of the twins we are led directly to Ephraim, the Ten Tribes of Israel—in the symbolic sense, to the Church with its birthright. The constellation Gemini, “the twins”, bears this meaning in every language—“joined”, “paired”—two united as one. The Hebrew name appears in Exodus 26:24: “and they shall be coupled together beneath”—regarding the tabernacle, which in the New Testament is repeatedly presented as a picture of the Church.
Twins belong together; they share each other’s fate; they are identified with each other, yet one stands above the other. That is expressed in Ephraim and Manasseh, both sons of Joseph. Ephraim is one portion; Manasseh the other; and together they represent Joseph—divided in two. Ephraim symbolises the Ten Tribes; Manasseh the Two Tribes. Together they represent Israel as a whole, as one.
Thus the sign of Castor and Pollux points to Christ, the Firstborn—applied to our age—to Joseph, to Ephraim.

Acts 28:13–16
13 And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli:

14 Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome.
15 And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.
16 And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.
Rhegium is “Regio”, at the south-western tip of the Italian peninsula. From there the journey goes literally “before the wind”, up the coast to the north, to Puteoli. The name means “wells” or “springs”; mineral springs are found in the area. It is the bay and thus the harbour of Naples.
In Puteoli they found believers and stayed with them for seven days—remarkably so, for they were prisoners. Apparently there was no urgent hurry. Then at last the party continues to their final destination: Rome. Again believers (“brethren”) come to meet them, as far as the Appian Forum on the Via Appia—the road running south of Rome along the coast. The “Three Taverns” is a separate location, roughly ten kilometres further. The idea is that two different groups came from Rome: one met them at the Appian Forum, the other a little nearer to the city. From the Appian Forum the distance to Rome was about sixty-five kilometres.
Julius the centurion hands over the prisoners. Paul is permitted to live on his own, accompanied by the soldier who guarded him. Paul had appealed to Caesar, and thus he remains in “voluntary custody”. He is a “free prisoner” at his own expense. It is his own legal case, which he must fund; he must also provide his own lodging. Yet he is still a prisoner, for he is continually under guard.
I suspect the guard was present mostly for form’s sake; a man who has appealed to Caesar is hardly likely to flee. Officially, however, he remains constantly under watch and may not leave the city. Within the city he has freedom of movement, but always accompanied by a soldier.
This situation lasted two years. During that time he received “all who came to him” (v.30). He lived in a hired house—not his own. Again this symbolises the position of the Church. Paul stands at the head of a household—on a lower level, the Church—receiving all who come to him: “preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no man forbidding him” (v.31). That is precisely the condition of the Church today: officially outside the social order, dwelling in another’s house.

Acts 28:17–22
17 And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.
18 Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me.
19 But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto

Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of.
20 For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.
21 And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee.
22 But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.
Once again “three days” are mentioned. Paul summons “the chief of the Jews” in Rome and addresses them as “men and brethren” – exactly how Acts began, with Peter’s speech. He explains how he came to be in Rome and insists that he has done nothing “against the people or customs of the fathers”.
The Jews in Rome, for their part, had heard no evil report about Paul from Judea. From this passage you must conclude that the Jews everywhere were, in one way or another, under the influence of Jerusalem – of the Sanhedrin, under the high priest. That also tells you that these “chief of the Jews” in Rome were regarded as the official representatives of Judaism there, while still subject to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. So again we are really dealing with the “Jewish government”.
Paul links himself with them and repeats what we have already heard in earlier chapters, in his previous defences: he has done nothing against the people or the ancestral customs. Paul knows Judaism better than anyone and strongly denies that he has acted against Jewish law as such. He also denies that his message contradicts Jewish belief. Jewish tradition proclaims the coming of the Messiah, and Paul says that this Messiah has indeed come – Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, according to Old Testament evidence. He maintains this here before these Jewish leaders and then asks what they themselves know of the matter, and whether anything has reached them. It turns out nothing has. They have received no instructions from Jerusalem.
In those days, the British prince Caradoc (Caractacus) was also in Rome as a prisoner, after the Britons had been subdued by the Romans and Caradoc and his family betrayed. They were taken to Rome – this is extensively described in secular history. Caradoc too was in a kind of voluntary captivity. He had already made a speech before the emperor in Rome, as a conquered enemy who formally had to appear before the court. We still possess the text of that speech.
The emperor’s verdict – and that was unique – was that Caradoc was not put to death but released. Ordinarily, such enemies were publicly executed. Caradoc had only to swear that he would never again take up arms against Rome. He did so, and then had to remain in Rome for seven years as a prisoner. After that he was allowed to return to Britain. So Caradoc also lived there as a “free prisoner” of the emperor, with his own house.
If we know that the Gospel was first accepted at government level by the Britons, then we must conclude that the Britons represent the tribe of Ephraim. Here in Rome we find the British king from the Silurian royal house – at least one of its branches: one in the south of England (Britannia

proper) and the other in what we call Wales, where Caradoc came from. The other branch was that of Arviragus in Glastonbury, who had received the Gospel from Joseph of Arimathea.
So Paul now arrives in Rome, and what do you think he is going to do there? Whom would he be most eager to visit first – aside from possible family ties that are said to have existed? It seems entirely logical that Paul would seek out King Caradoc. Scripture deliberately keeps this “hidden”, because it touches on Joseph (Ephraim) and the Ten Tribes. Outside the Bible, however, there is quite a lot of material that points in this direction.

Acts 28:23–26
23 And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.
24 And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.
25 And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers,
26 Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive:
They set a day for him, and on that day many came to the place where Paul was staying. So he must have had quite a sizeable space at his disposal. Where do you find that? In the palace – the Palatium Britannicum – which was later converted into a bath complex and afterwards into a church.
There, the apostle Paul explains the kingdom of God. He calls them to faith in Jesus, who is the King of that kingdom. He testifies, from both “the law of Moses” and “the prophets” (Isaiah would certainly have been among them), that Jesus is the Messiah. That is a very extensive subject. Paul spends the whole day on it: “from morning till evening.”
He puts great effort and energy into explaining the Gospel to these Jewish leaders and “trying to persuade them” – and that is a “Herculean task”. As always, “some” believe and “some” do not. Then disputes arise, and you know how that goes: a discussion about the Bible nearly always ends in quarrelling. They are “not agreed among themselves”. They part company inwardly, and then they separate outwardly as well.
This happens after Paul has said one last decisive word: namely that he fully agrees that the Holy Spirit did speak to their forefathers through Isaiah the prophet when he declared that “this people” would indeed hear, but “not understand”; that they would see, but “not perceive”. They would not grasp what was said or what was set before their eyes – although it had been foretold long beforehand.

Acts 28:27
27 For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their

eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.
These words are taken from Isaiah 6:9:
“Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.”
Words with the same thrust appear in Ezekiel 12, in other parts of Isaiah, and in the Minor Prophets. Paul quotes Isaiah 6 in such a way that he applies it directly to his own time. I find this amusing because of what is said and because of how it is repeatedly cited in the New Testament – by virtually all the evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) and in the epistle to the Romans.
It is quoted several times as a description of a people that refuses to believe and thereby becomes spiritually disabled; they can no longer hear or see. In Isaiah 6:10 we read:
“Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes…”.
A “fat” heart is a “thick” heart – it no longer functions properly. The heart is meant to be the seat of faith. If it is clogged, faith does not function rightly.
In Acts 28:27, however, it does not say: “make the heart of this people fat…”. Here the emphasis is that the people have done it to themselves. In Isaiah, the Lord tells Isaiah to carry out this ministry. He is sent to proclaim God’s Word to Israel, and the consequence – since they do not believe and do not want to believe – is that their heart becomes fat and their ears heavy. The more Isaiah preached the Word, the less they would see, hear, and believe.
God has an interest in this being demonstrated. In these last days He has spoken to us by the Son (Hebrews 1:1), yet men do not wish to hear Him. The result is the hardening of the people. The situation in Isaiah’s day becomes the pattern for our own time.
The Lord Jesus Himself quotes these words and applies them to His own generation. In Matthew 13 He speaks in parables:
“Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.
And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive…” (vv. 13–16)
The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are now given in veiled form. The Lord speaks in parables and shows them pictures (see Matthew 13:1). Jesus leaves the house and sits by the sea-side. In Scripture “sitting” signifies rest – ceasing from activity. A great multitude gathers to Him by the sea – the nations, at the ends of the earth. It is a remarkable sign. The Lord leaves Israel – at least the Jewish people – and sits by the “sea of the nations”. From among the Gentiles He gathers a people for His Name, who will “see and hear”. A ship is a picture of the Church, as we have already noticed in Acts. From the ship – from the Church – the Word of God is preached to those by the sea, and that message concerns the kingdom. It is given in parables, in veiled language.

That is the connection between this passage and Acts 28. The scene they witnessed is a symbolic picture of our present situation.
Here, in Acts 28:27, Paul states this truth explicitly – several decades later. It has already been demonstrated all through the book of Acts, but at the end of the book it is declared in so many words: this people is hardened. And that statement is followed by this conclusion, reflecting a state of affairs that had then existed already for many years:

Acts 28:28
28 Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.
At least they have been told what is going on, and it will be clear to them that the fact that the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles is bound up with the hardening of the Jewish people through unbelief.
Notice carefully what is not written here. Many read into the text something that is not there, namely: "…that the salvation of God shall now be sent to the Gentiles." But that is not what it says at all.
We have not read the previous chapters for nothing. From them it should be perfectly clear that the salvation of God had already been sent to the Gentiles much earlier. That is obvious from all those accounts in which the Gospel is preached to Gentiles, and the Gentiles respond very positively.
In Acts 13:48 we read:
"When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."
The idea that "the salvation of God" would especially be preached to the Gentiles by Paul is a persistent misunderstanding about his role. The term "apostle of the Gentiles" does not mean that the apostle was primarily sent to the Gentiles. Paul himself was a Gentile – a Roman citizen – and he consciously exercised his ministry in that position. But he preached to Jews. We have seen that Paul only occasionally preached the Gospel directly to Gentiles. Nineteen chapters show clearly that wherever he went, he went to the Jews first. He was "the Gentile apostle" in the sense that he was a Gentile (a Roman), preaching the Gospel to the Jews in the dispersion.
To them Paul declares that salvation – the kingdom of Christ – has found its home, its residence, among the Gentiles. It properly belonged to the Jews; the kingdom of the Messiah was to be a Jewish kingdom. Yet it was taken from them. Paul's message was not new; all the apostles preached the same, and the Lord Jesus had already said it in:
Matthew 21:43
"Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."
Lay that verse alongside Acts 28:28. As always, it is a matter of comparing Scripture with Scripture. The kingdom of God – salvation – is taken away and given to another nation. What was intended for the Jews, what was Jewish in character (and still will be so in the future), is taken from them and given to another people. That is only logical: the kingdom had become reality, but the Jewish people did not accept it; therefore it is

given to another nation (singular). That is a Gentile nation, according to Acts 28:28: “the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles.”
This is not the Church, for the Church is not a “nation”. The Church consists of those who share in the kingdom. To which nation, then, has “salvation”, the kingdom of God, been sent?
Isaiah says:
Isaiah 65:1
“I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name.”
The Lord is no longer hidden but revealed to people who were not even looking for Him. There was a people walking in darkness, and for them the light dawned. Which people is that? Isaiah explains:
Isaiah 8:23; 9:1, 7, 8
“…by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations.
The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light…”
“The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel.
And all the people shall know, even Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria…”
So it is clearly foretold that “salvation” will find its home among the Gentiles in general and among Ephraim (the Ten Tribes) in particular.
Ephraim – a Western people – receives the birthright before Judah (Jeremiah 31:9). Of that people the Lord Jesus says: “which shall bring forth the fruits thereof.” Set that alongside Acts 28:28: “and **they** will hear it.” The two verses have the same structure.
The “fruit of Ephraim” is the Church, which is regarded as having sprung from Ephraim. The Church is out of Joseph: it is not “Jewish-Christian” but “Ephraimite-Christian” – that other part of Israel, although it does not bear the name.
Thus Ephraim holds the final birthright. If salvation had remained with the Jews, then the Jewish people would have “borne fruit” – they would have “carried” the Church as the firstfruits of the New Covenant: those who first share in the risen Christ. But “salvation” is given to another people, and that had already happened by the time Paul speaks in Acts 28:28. His statement is a formal declaration of something long in progress.
It is, in fact, a legal matter: the official Jewish leadership has rejected the Gospel. For the very same legal reason, the Gospel must now be officially presented to the Ten Tribes of Israel, to Ephraim.
In my view – though I cannot prove it – Acts 28:28 was spoken in the house, the palace, of the British prince who at that time was living in exile in Rome. Perhaps Caradoc, with his children Claudia and Linus, and his son-in-law Pudens, was present at this very meeting. If the Jews in Rome had asked Paul where “salvation” had gone, he could have said: here, in the British palace.
The legal foundation for the position of the Church of the firstborn lies in the conversion of that British royal house – the conversion of Ephraim – irrespective of how many individuals actually believed at the time, for that is not the point. God’s promises were to be fulfilled to the Ten Tribes in

exile. Those promises include: the formation of the Church from the Ten Tribes.
There is still something else. Paul may have been Jewish in religion, but in terms of tribal descent he was not from Judah, as he himself says, but from Benjamin. Benjamin is one of the “two tribes”, and thus falls under the umbrella of Judah – yet at the start Benjamin actually did not belong to Judah. Judah stood on its own.
Benjamin, moreover, is Joseph’s only full brother, and Joseph stands at the head of the Ten Tribes. That should have been eleven tribes, because Judah was “torn away” from Israel. God’s blessing did not follow Rehoboam (Judah), but Jeroboam – and thus what should have been eleven tribes. Then the Lord said: I will take one tribe away from Jeroboam, leaving ten, “that David my servant may have a light alway before me in Jerusalem” (1 Kings 11:36). Benjamin represents Joseph by Judah. If we think in terms of a lamp, Benjamin represents the Lord by Judah, on behalf of Joseph.
Benjamin really belongs with those Ten Tribes – he is in reality one of the eleven. They are only counted as ten because Benjamin is “seconded” – temporarily placed with Judah. That was said at the time of the division of the two and the ten tribes. It is a kind of promise, a prophecy.
If you follow that line through, the only person you find who fulfils it is Paul. He is the lamp of Joseph by Judah. At the start of his story in Acts, we find Paul the Benjamite among the Jews, belonging to Judah; by the end, he is no longer with Judah, but stands as a Gentile, and – as I see it – in the British palace, the palace of Joseph.
The difference between Paul and the other apostles is this: the apostles in general were Jews who preached the Gospel to Gentiles; Paul was a Gentile (a Roman) who preached the Gospel to Jews. The reverse pattern.
Why does the book end this way? Because Paul is a model of the Church in our present age, which is understood to be a Church from the nations, commissioned to preach the Gospel to the Jews. Since Ephraim would do this, the Church also has that Ephraimite background.
Acts 28:28 is both a proclamation and a statement of the status quo. That is how things stand. The story stops there because, up to the return of Christ, nothing changes in that status. There is nothing further to report.

Acts 28:29–31
29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.
30 And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,
31 Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.
After these final words in the narrative, the Jews left. They disappear from the stage, arguing fiercely amongst themselves, and from that point they stand outside the work and plan of God. They are counted among the Gentiles. They were “Ammi” (“My people”) and become “Lo-Ammi” (“Not My people”, Hosea 1–2).

Paul remained for two whole years in “his own hired house”. That simply means he paid rent – it could just as well have been a room in a lodging house. It is quite likely that the British palace provided his board and lodging.
Paul “received all who came to him”. This is a picture of the Church age in which we still live: Paul as the great pattern and personification of the Church. He remained where he was, two complete years in “exile”. The Ten Tribes likewise remained in exile. Now the situation is: whoever will may come and hear – and that is exactly the description of our present age. The same applies to verse 31:
“Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no man forbidding him.”
Some ultradispensationalists still stumble over this verse and say: “Well, the Kingdom is the manifested Kingdom on earth, and Paul was still preaching that here, so the real change in the message – and thus the real beginning of the building of the Church – only comes after Acts 28, since here he was still preaching the Kingdom of God for two years. We, however, preach the Church”, they say.
But it is quite true that even in his last letters Paul still uses the term “the kingdom of God”. Second Timothy is generally regarded (rightly or wrongly, that I do not know) as Paul’s final letter. In one of its closing verses he again speaks of the Kingdom:
2 Timothy 4:18
“And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”
The whole point is this: the Church is the Kingdom. Yes, more is yet to come; it is the beginning of the Kingdom, but that does not make it any less the Kingdom. The Church is the government, as it were. What has been postponed is not the Kingdom itself, but the manifestation of the Kingdom. We do, in fact, share in the Kingdom already.
In connection with Acts 28 it had to be explained that the Kingdom is now hidden and has its domicile, not with Judah, but in our days with Ephraim – or, in another sense, that it is hidden in heaven and will only be revealed in the future.
The question at the end of Acts is: what happened after those two years? The account stops here. Since it does not say that Paul was beheaded after those two years – which would only have needed one short sentence – I therefore believe he was simply released. Why not? His previous judges had wanted to release him as well. I see no reason why the emperor should not do the same.
Moreover, if the writer of Acts knows that Paul was imprisoned there for two years, he also knows what happened after those two years. If he does not say that Paul then died a martyr’s death, you may assume that he was in fact set free. From Paul’s letters – such as 2 Timothy, Philippians and Hebrews – you can gather that he was released. I do not know exactly when those letters were written, but he certainly says that he expects to be set free. Verse 18 of 2 Timothy 4 implies it:
“The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom…”

Not “preserve me for heaven”, but preserve him so that he might continue active service in that Kingdom. What kind of work? That is stated at the end of Acts 28: “preaching and teaching the kingdom of God, with all boldness, unhindered.” That this continued seems obvious.
I read Paul’s words in 2 Timothy 4, “Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me”, and clearly not followed by: “for I shall soon be beheaded”. That would make no sense. In that case Paul might as well have said: “Do not bother coming to me, for by the time you arrive, I shall be gone.”
Instead, in the next verses we read:
2 Timothy 4:10–13
10 For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.
11 Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.
12 And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus.
13 The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments.
For how long would Mark be “profitable to me for the ministry”? Long enough to make it worthwhile. Best of all is this: “Bring the cloak that I left at Troas… and the books… and the parchments.” Parchments are also books, but of a more precious kind. What would Paul want with a travelling cloak? Obviously, he is planning to travel. Why else is that information preserved in Scripture, if not to show us that he would indeed travel again after his imprisonment?
His actual imprisonment is the picture of the position of the Church – “outside the camp”. What happened afterwards is not reported; it does not concern the type. But that he was historically released and travelled again seems clear enough here.
This is confirmed also by verse 17, which alludes to Psalm 22 in connection with “the mouth of the lion”:
2 Timothy 4:17
“Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.”
In verse 21 Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brethren are greeted. Pudens, Linus and Claudia belong to the British royal house.
Verse 21 begins with:
2 Timothy 4:21
“Do thy diligence to come before winter…”
That sounds as if he is urging Timothy to come in good time, to avoid travelling in the winter. Where Paul then went afterwards, we have an idea from Scripture itself – from the epistle to the Romans:
Romans 15:24
“Whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you: for I trust to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way thitherward by you, if first I be somewhat filled with your company.”
He had been planning to visit Rome on his way to Spain. Overland, that route runs via Rome, and Paul very likely took that route to Spain. That he actually did so is recorded in church history, where it is said he went to

the far West, even “to the islands”, to the “tin island” – in other words to Britain – where he became the patron saint of London. Hence the cathedral in London is called “St Paul’s”.
So the biblical narrative ends here. The official record stops, but that is not the end of the story. On the contrary, it is precisely the announcement of the situation which would last, like those “two whole years” (2 x 1000 years), from the first coming of Christ until His return: the period in which salvation is committed to the Gentiles, of whom Paul is the type, and in which, through preaching from and by the Gentiles, God gathers for His Name a people from among the nations (Acts 15:14) – a people of firstborn ones – and afterwards Judah comes into view again.

“Acts 29” – Introductory note
In our Bibles the book of Acts has 28 chapters. Here we add chapter 29. “Acts 29” is an apocryphal chapter and therefore not included in the “canon of Scripture” – the list of books that, in Christendom, are regarded as God-inspired and doctrinally authoritative (2 Timothy 3:16).
This chapter about the work of the apostle Paul is so interesting, especially in regard to his journeys – for example to Britain, where he apparently stayed and laboured for some time – that, while fully acknowledging that it does not belong to the inspired Word of God, we nevertheless wish to pass this information on.

Paul in London
The chapter is particularly striking where it speaks of Paul’s travels, including to Britain, where he is said to have spent some time in ministry. Verse 9 mentions Paul going to “Mount Lud”, in what we now know as London in England. The original name of the city founded by Brutus of Troy on the river was “Troia Nova” (New Troy). On “Ludgate Hill” today stands St Paul’s Cathedral – not by coincidence.
Verses 11 and 12 also point forward to the time after the seventieth week of Daniel, when the Gospel will go forth from Jerusalem over all the earth; the time when a King will reign who will judge the nations, yet to their blessing; whose peace will be a lasting peace, according to Paul’s speech on the place in London where St Paul’s Cathedral now stands.

“Acts 29:1–26”
1. And Paul, filled with the blessing of Christ and rich in the Spirit, departed from Rome, having resolved to go to Spain; for he had long planned to travel there, and had also intended from there to go on to Great Britain.
2. For in Phoenicia he had heard that some of the children of Israel, around the time of the Assyrian captivity, had escaped by sea to the far-off islands – as mentioned by the prophet Esdras (apocryphal) – which the Romans called Britain.
3. And the Lord had commanded that the Gospel should be preached far away to the Gentiles (nations) and to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (Acts 9:15; And Paul testified boldly and without hindrance about Jesus, before courts and before the people. He took some of the brothers who had been with him in Rome, and they embarked at

Ostia. With a favourable wind, they were brought safely to a harbour in Spain.

4. Many people gathered from the surrounding towns, villages, and the hill country, for they had heard of the Apostle’s conversion and of the many miracles he had performed.
5. And Paul preached with great power in Spain, and vast multitudes believed and were saved, for they recognised that he was an Apostle sent by God.
6. And they departed from Spain, and Paul and his companions found a ship in Armorica that would take them to Great Britain. They set sail, and as they travelled along the southern coast of England, they found a harbour named Raphinus. (This is the Roman name for Sandwich, in Kent. In Saxon times there still stood in Sandwich an old house called “The House of the Apostles”.)
7. When it became widely known that the Apostle had arrived on their shores, large groups of inhabitants came out to meet him, and they received him warmly. He entered their city through the East Gate and stayed in the house of a Hebrew, one of his own people.
8. In the morning he rose and went up to Mount Lud (Ludgate Hill and Broadway in London, England, where St Paul’s Cathedral now stands). The people crowded together at the gate and gathered in Broadway, and he preached Christ to them, and they believed the Word and the testimony of Jesus.
9. In the evening the Holy Spirit came upon Paul, and he prophesied, saying:
   “Behold, in the last days the God of Peace will dwell in the cities, and the inhabitants will be counted, and at the seventh counting their eyes will be opened, and the glory of their inheritance will be made known to them. The nations will come to worship on the mountain; this is the testimony of the patience and long-suffering of a servant of the Lord.”
10. “And in the last days new messages of the Gospel will come from Jerusalem, and the hearts of the people will rejoice, and behold, fountains will be opened and there will be no more plague.”
11. “In those days there will be wars and rumours of wars; and a king will arise, and his sword will be for the healing of the nations, and his peace will be an everlasting peace, and the glory of his kingdom will be a wonder among princes.”
12. And it happened that some of the Druids came to Paul personally, and by their rites and ceremonies it became clear that they were descendants of the Jews (Judaeans) who had escaped from the captivity in Egypt. The Apostle believed these things, and he gave them the kiss of peace.
13. And Paul stayed three months in his lodging, strengthening the faith, and preaching Christ continually.
14. And after these things Paul and his brothers departed from Raphinus and sailed to Atium in Gaul.
15. And Paul preached to the Roman garrison and among the people, urging them to confess their sins and to repent.

16. And some of the Belgae came to him to question him about the new doctrine and about the man Jesus, and Paul opened his heart to them and told them of the things that had happened to him, and that Jesus had come into the world to save sinners; and they departed, and spoke among themselves about the things they had heard.
17. And after much preaching and hard labour, Paul and his fellow workers came into Helvetia (Switzerland) and came to a mountain called Pontius Pilate, where he who had condemned the Lord had miserably taken his own life.
18. Immediately a mountain stream burst forth from the rock and washed his broken body into a lake. Selah!
19. And Paul stretched out his hands over the water and prayed to the Lord, saying, “O Lord God, grant a sign to all nations, that Pontius Pilate, who condemned Your only-begotten Son, has come to his end here.”
20. And while Paul was still speaking, behold, there came a great earthquake, and the surface of the water of the lake changed and revealed the likeness of the Son of Man, in the agony of death, hanging upon the cross.
21. And a voice came from heaven saying, “Even Pilate has escaped the wrath to come, for he washed his hands before the multitude when the blood of Jesus was shed. Peace. Amen.”